Five Centuries of English Verse: Wordsworth to Tennyson

William Stebbing

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Five Centuries of English Verse: Wordsworth to Tennyson

William Stebbing

FIVE CENTURIES OF ENGLISH VERSE

IMPRESSIONS

BY

WILLIAM STEBBING

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UNIV. OF CALIFORNIA

FIVE CENTURIES OF ENGLISH VERSE

WILLIAM WORDSWORTH

1770—1850

An Evangelist among the heathen for thirty years. Supreme Pontiff for twenty. What is he now?

No student of literature can doubt what he was. In the history of learning Crusades are no novelties. The close of the eighteenth and earlier part of the nineteenth centuries had a monopoly of crusading in poetry. Goethe and Schiller in Germany; de Musset, Victor Hugo, with the Romanticists, in France; Wordsworth, at the head of the Lake School, in England, sang and fought, sang to fight. Elizabethan poets waged no wars; they were discoverers without being, in the realm of fancy, buccaneers, as some of them were on the Spanish Main. These others were invaders of established kingdoms, as were the Israelites of Canaan. Of all the combatant poets Wordsworth had set himself the hardest task, and won the most signal victory. His hand was against every man. In the rude battle he did not shun to wound a natural ally—a forerunner, like Cowper, in the onslaught upon poetic diction, an observer of rural life, like Thomson! A fanatic doubtless—at once of wide views, and narrow; but it was he who, though in the panoply of a Captain, fighting for the most part alone, taught how to replace poetic phrases and commonplaces by poetic ideas clothed in plain, pure English, with rhythm to match. Above all, it is to him

mainly that literature owes the solemn inauguration of the worship of Nature.

He threw down, and he built up. Though undoubtedly heralded by Cowper, he substantially opened the new age of English verse, which closes for us with Tennyson. His famous brethren in song, more or less unconsciously, even mocking Byron, underwent his influence, while they vaunted their independence. The later poetry of the nineteenth century has been, as a whole, though with an addition of melody, of his house and lineage. He accomplished a grand work in virtue of splendid poetic gifts, extraordinary philosophic insight, and obstinate, indomitable courage. As necessary a property for him, I fear, was, as for many great poets, an absolute, and, in his case, innocent, incapacity for recognizing the existence of singers besides himself. Is it an intelligible contradiction in terms to say that, while he was addicted to warm moral indignation, and admiration, he had a cold heart? An absence of the sense of humour was a part of his equipment which was, perhaps, essential. If it blinded him to absurdities in the exaggeration of his critical principles, it also steeled him against ignorant ridicule. Gallantly he flung down before adversaries, whom his inspiration bewildered and enraged no less than his eccentricities, the gauntlet of his Peter Bell, weathercockless Kilve, Childless Timothy, Expostulation and Reply, with divers more as strange! Then, when the poet ceased to sing unless to an inner circle, what wisdom still, what understanding of the soul of things! The priest remained, with the inherent sanctity which had justified his original investiture with the poet's mantle. We feel him ready to go on prophesying should the commission be renewed; blissfully unconscious of the probable Never. Literary history shows few more pathetic figures than the

old man, when visible within the diminished circle of his disciples ; a righteous witness and zealot, eager to defend the cause of poetical truth as in youth ; with no foes to mock and persecute him ; none for him to ban and burn : clad in sacerdotal robes above his armour ; seeming to a careless, ungrateful world to be sacrificing cold-dead victims on a cold-dead altar.

I cannot but recognize that the mass of his verse has ceased to please. That is the common fate of poetry in bulk. It must be conceded that the rule applies especially here. Ordinary readers even with a taste for poetry are satisfied with a fraction of his. As it happens, the few favourites are generally the fruit of earlier years. But comparisons of age may well be of interest for students of literature ; they do not affect the question of absolute merit. When I am choosing pieces to make my own, and love, I do not consider dates. Similarly I do not concern myself with Wordsworth's philosophy, unless so far as it was the motive for a poem, and colours it. As it happened, the philosophy was of a kind to bear a very intimate relation to the poetry. The scheme of it was the pre-existence of spirit in an angelic state, and its new birth into a new order of Nature prepared for it by the Divine Architect. The fabric, with its appointed centre and lord, was designed to be admirably fair and happy. In all its constituents, from man to beast, to the flowers of the field, mountain and valley, winds and waters, it was meant to develop by the law of its being into beauty, mutually grateful loving-kindness, sympathy, symmetry, and harmony.

As a thinker he seems to have fashioned for himself some such system as this for our globe. Being a poet born he was in the habit of summoning inspiration to minister to the idea. I can understand the fascination to

his elect disciples of watching the relation in his verse of the two powers, the two characters. A distinct chapter in psychology might be devoted to the manner in which the theory now and again subdues imagination to its service; now and again, though more in youth than age, while answering the summons, snatches up the Philosopher, and carries him, not where he, but where the Poet, would. It is not our province here to inquire whether he were primarily Poet because Philosopher, or Philosopher because Poet. For our purpose it is enough to appreciate his doctrine that Nature loves to clothe all her works with beauty; that she wishes her principal creature, man, to see it, enjoy it, complete it; to imitate her in love and goodness to all; that he ought to learn from the excellence—of Divine origin—in her and hers, how closely he is linked to Heaven. We need not, to discover the Poet in him, endeavour to piece together a complete system out of his verse. Let us delight ourselves with its charm, wherever we find it—not quarrelling with the sweetness because the honeycomb may be hidden among the bones of a dead lion of thought.

To take offence at Wordsworth because the philosopher in him is, it must be acknowledged, never very far off, would be to banish ourselves from his kingdom of poetry altogether. Ideas, vast and lofty, are constantly discernible, willing to hold aloof or approach, as the reader will. Where any of them insist upon associating themselves with the melody, welcome them; for the claim proves them and the inspiration to be one. Throughout ample spaces of garden-land where he reigns, thought, even for those who do not delve and mine in it, adds atmosphere and a sense of mystery. Who can account it ill in a poet that to his eyes Nature is always longing to demonstrate herself to

be both delightful and beneficent! In a legion of instances he could not have done better poetically had he been searching for beauty with as little heed to a lesson from it as an Elizabethan minstrel of love. He could have produced no more spontaneous apparitions of metrical sweetness!

Lucy is not the less lyrically lovely that she impersonates Nature's ideal workmanship:

> The floating clouds their state shall lend
> To her; for her the willow bend;
> Nor shall she fail to see
> Even in the motions of the Storm
> Grace that shall mould the Maiden's form
> By silent sympathy.
>
> The stars of midnight shall be dear
> To her; and she shall lean her ear
> In many a secret place
> Where rivulets dance their wayward round,
> And beauty born of murmuring sound
> Shall pass into her face.[1]

Doom to an early death has not the less pathos in it that it may exemplify Nature's serene composure in bringing forth flowers not the less exquisite that they will fade:

> She dwelt among the untrodden ways
> Beside the springs of Dove,
> A Maid whom there were none to praise
> And very few to love;
>
> A violet by a mossy stone
> Half hidden from the eye!—
> Fair as a star, when only one
> Is shining in the sky.
>
> She lived unknown, and few could know
> When Lucy ceased to be;
> But she is in her grave, and, oh,
> The difference to me![2]

Here is an analysis of the stages of perfect womanhood :

She was a Phantom of delight
When first she gleamed upon my sight ;
A lovely Apparition, sent
To be a moment's ornament ;
Her eyes as stars of Twilight fair ;
Like Twilight's, too, her dusky hair ;
But all things else about her drawn
From May-time and the cheerful Dawn ;
A dancing Shape, an Image gay,
To haunt, to startle, and waylay.

And now I see with eye serene
The very pulse of the machine;
A Being breathing thoughtful breath,
A Traveller between life and death ;
The reason firm, the temperate will,
Endurance, foresight, strength, and skill ;
A perfect Woman, nobly planned,
To warn, to comfort, and command ;
And yet a Spirit still, and bright
With something of angelic light.[3]

With its wealth of insight, it stands on a level, neither higher nor lower, in poetical enchantment—since both are in that supreme—with the vision of the unknown Highland Reaper :

Behold her, single in the field,
Yon solitary Highland lass !
Reaping and singing by herself ;
Stop here, or gently pass !
Alone she cuts and binds the grain,
And sings a melancholy strain ;
O listen ! for the Vale profound
Is overflowing with the sound.

No Nightingale did ever chaunt
More welcome notes to weary bands
Of travellers in some shady haunt,
Among Arabian sands ;

A voice so thrilling ne'er was heard
In spring-time from the Cuckoo-bird,
Breaking the silence of the seas
Amongst the farthest Hebrides.

Will no one tell me what she sings ?—
Perhaps the plaintive numbers flow
For old, unhappy, far-off things,
And battles long ago ;
Or is it some more humble lay,
Familiar matter of to-day ?
Some natural sorrow, loss or pain,
That has been, and may be again ?

Whate'er the theme, the Maiden sang
As if her song could have no ending ;
I saw her singing at her work,
And o'er the sickle bending ;—
I listened, motionless and still ;
And, as I mounted up the hill,
The music in my heart I bore,
Long after it was heard no more.[4]

The full orchestra provided for the poet by his winged neighbours in his native dales has a world of various meaning for him. Yet how simply, and unsystematically, sweet, is each several carol ! The Nightingale plays at stirring the restless blood, which the stock-dove would soothe :

O Nightingale ! thou surely art
A creature of a ' fiery heart ' ;
These notes of thine—they pierce and pierce ;
Tumultuous harmony and fierce !
Thou sing'st as if the God of wine
Had helped thee to a Valentine ;
A song in mockery and despite
Of shades, and dews, and silent night ;
And steady bliss, and all the loves
Now sleeping in their peaceful groves.[5]

The Skylark teaches that love may both aspire and stoop :

Ethereal minstrel ! pilgrim of the sky !
Dost thou despise the earth where cares abound !
Or, while the wings aspire, are heart and eye
Both with thy nest upon the dewy ground ?
Thy nest which thou canst drop into at will,
Those quivering wings composed, that music still !

Leave to the nightingale her shady wood ;
A privacy of glorious light is thine ;
Whence thou dost pour upon the world a flood
Of harmony, with instinct more divine ;
Type of the wise who soar, but never roam ;
True to the kindred points of Heaven and Home ![6]

The Linnet seems to preach not at all, but has his lesson too—that Nature commands to be glad :

One have I marked, the happiest guest
In all this covert of the blest ;
Hail to thee, far above the rest
  In joy of voice and pinion !
Thou, Linnet ! in thy green array,
Presiding Spirit here to-day,
Dost lead the revels of the May ;
  And this is thy dominion.

While birds and butterflies, and flowers,
Make all one band of paramours,
Thou, ranging up and down the bowers,
  Art sole in thy employment ;
A Life, a Presence like the Air,
Scattering thy gladness without care,
Too blest with any one to pair ;
  Thyself thy own enjoyment.[7]

Fit companion is he in his airy pulpit for the joyous wild flowers that the poet surprised, revelling too, one spring on the shores of Grasmere :

A host, of golden daffodils,
Beside the lake, beneath the trees,
Fluttering and dancing in the breeze.

Continuous as the stars that shine,
And twinkle on the milky way,
They stretched in never-ending line
Along the margin of a bay;
Ten thousand saw I at a glance,
Tossing their heads in sprightly dance,

The waves beside them danced; but they
Outdid the sparkling waves in glee;
A poet could not but be gay,
In such a jocund company.[8]

Universal nature, in his creed, was designed to rejoice, and insists on rejoicing; but no investiture with a prophet's mantle is required to qualify lovers of inspired verse to feel the magic, the exulting happiness, of the strains in which the Poet of Nature proclaims his faith and glory in her beauty and tenderness.

Commonly it is possible to be thus sensible of the simple singer, apart from the seer, in Wordsworth—not always. I cannot pretend to press an indiscriminate resort to him for the amusement of an idle hour. He has strains of a grandeur, a beauty of sublimity, which it seems profane to rehearse unless as anthems chanted by worshippers with bare feet before an altar. From how far away seems to echo the soliloquy:

Earth has not anything to show more fair;
Dull would he be of soul who could pass by
A sight so touching in its majesty;
This City now doth, like a garment, wear
The beauty of the morning; silent, bare,
Ships, towers, domes, theatres, and temples lie
Open unto the fields, and to the sky;
All bright and glittering in the smokeless air.
Never did sun more beautifully steep
In his first splendour, valley, rock, or hill;

Ne'er saw I, never felt, a calm so deep!
The river glideth at his own sweet will;
Dear God! the very houses seem asleep;
And all that mighty heart is lying still![9]

Again, his is a Voice in the wilderness which, not affecting to be able to cure the disease, protests against personal contamination by the prevailing rebellion of flesh against spirit, of Earth against Heaven:

The world is too much with us; late and soon,
Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers;
Little we see in Nature that is ours;
We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon!
This Sea that bares her bosom to the moon;
The winds that will be howling at all hours,
And are up-gathered now like sleeping flowers;
For this, for everything, we are out of tune;
It moves us not.—Great God! I'd rather be
A Pagan suckled in a creed outworn;
So might I, standing on this pleasant lea,
Have glimpses that would make me less forlorn;
Have sight of Proteus rising from the sea;
Or hear old Triton blow his wreathèd horn![10]

Listen finally to the two emulous spiritual rivals for control of Wordsworth's soul—Thought the profoundest, Imagination at its loveliest—coalescing, as in the mighty Ode, into a long-resounding peal of music, realizing the Miltonic vision of Philosophy, celestially harmonious:

The Rainbow comes and goes,
And lovely is the Rose;
The Moon doth with delight
Look round her when the heavens are bare;
Waters on a starry night
Are beautiful and fair;
The sunshine is a glorious birth;
But yet I know, where'er I go,
That there hath past away a glory from the earth.

Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting:
The Soul that rises with us, our life's Star,
Hath had elsewhere its setting,
And cometh from afar;
Not in entire forgetfulness,
And not in utter nakedness,
But trailing clouds of glory do we come
From God, who is our Home;
Heaven lies about us in our infancy!
Shades of the prison-house begin to close
Upon the growing Boy,
But he beholds the light, and whence it flows,
He sees it in his joy;
The Youth, who daily farther from the east
Must travel, still is Nature's Priest,
And by the vision splendid
Is on his way attended;
At length the Man perceives it die away,
And fade into the light of common day.

. . . . . .

O joy! that in our embers
Is something that doth live,
That nature yet remembers
What was so fugitive!
The thought of our past years in me doth breed
Perpetual benediction; not indeed
For that which is most worthy to be blest;
Delight and liberty, the simple creed
Of Childhood, whether busy or at rest;
But for those first affections,
Those shadowy recollections,
Which, be they what they may,
Are yet the fountain light of all our day,
Are yet a master light of all our seeing!
Hence in a season of calm weather,
Though inland far we be,
Our Souls have sight of that immortal sea
Which brought us hither,
Can in a moment travel thither,

And see the Children sport upon the shore,
And hear the mighty waters rolling evermore.

And O, ye Fountains, Meadows, Hills, and Groves,
Forebode not any severing of our loves!
Yet in my heart of hearts I feel your might;
I only have relinquished one delight
To live beneath your more habitual sway.
Thanks to the human heart by which we live,
Thanks to its tenderness, its joys, and fears,
To me the meanest flower that blows can give
Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears.[11]

A consecration of music, as in this marvel, to the evolution of abstract thought must in the nature of things be exceptional. Yet the pursuers after melody may find their reward in exploring even the cold, dry places in the Master's philosophy. Grace and fire frequently will reveal themselves in unexpected spots. They light up now and again a dogmatic defiance of the intolerant literary canons of his youth, like Peter Bell—the butt of Byron:

In vain, through every changeful year,
Did Nature lead him as before;
A primrose by a river's brim
A yellow primrose was to him,
And it was nothing more.

At noon, when by the forest's edge
He lay beneath the branches high,
The soft blue sky did never melt
Into his heart; he never felt
The witchery of the soft blue sky![12]

An aspiring reflection will without warning break into gentle song:

The bees that soar for bloom,
High as the highest peak of Furness Fells,
Will murmur by the hour in foxglove bells.

Into a treatise, as Unbelievers might deem it, on Religious Faith, suddenly steps

> from the blazing chariot of the sun
> A beardless Youth, who touched a golden lute,
> And filled the illumined groves with ravishment.
> The nightly hunter, lifting a bright eye
> Up towards the crescent moon, with grateful heart
> Called on the lovely wanderer who bestowed
> That timely light, to share his joyous sport;
> And hence, a beaming Goddess with her Nymphs,
> Across the lawn and through the darksome grove,
> Not unaccompanied with tuneful notes
> By echo multiplied from rock or cave,
> Swept in the storm of chase; as moon and stars
> Glance rapidly along the clouded heaven,
> When winds are blowing strong.[13]

From the dreary, flinty groundwork of poor Simon Lee's infirmities is struck out a swift, illuminating spark of emotion, as tears speak his astonished thankfulness for a petty kindness:

> I've heard of hearts unkind, kind deeds
> With coldness still returning;
> Alas! the gratitude of men
> Hath oftener left me mourning.[14]

Sirach, the Son of Consolation, might have learnt much from Margaret's complaint of the neighbourly attempts at comfort to her in her bereavement:

> They pity me, and not my grief![15]

They who neglect their Wordsworth do not know how much they lose in a multitude of ways. The least study will convince of the folly of the description of the philosophy itself as 'wordy, drowzy, frowzy'. It is, on the contrary, a body of thought exalting and rejoicing—often in a setting as artistically satisfying as it is touchingly natural. The poet had studied man; and while he sees cause to lament

What man has made of man;

he recognizes with delight that, nevertheless,

We have all of us one human heart.

He is grateful to Nature, and to Nature's source, that, in improving earth's surface into infinite loveliness, they have not neglected the development of man also. There is many a one who,

doomed to go in company with Pain,
And Fear, and Bloodshed, miserable train!
Turns his necessity to glorious gain.[16]

He thanks Heaven for Milton, whose

soul was like a Star, and dwelt apart;[17]

for Burns, who

showed my youth
How Verse may build a princely throne
On humble truth;[18]

for the plough-boy's merry whoop; and for the stately Beggar-woman:

a creature
Beautiful to see—a weed of glorious feature![19]

for the proofs of humanity's ability to rise superior to fortune, afforded alike by the Royal Swede, and by the leech-gatherer, motionless as a cloud, on the lonely moor:

I could have laughed myself to scorn to find
In that decrepit Man so firm a mind;[20]

for Spring's bestowal of a train of flowers:

a mighty band,
Singing at my heart's command;

for the spirit breathed for him in the woods, which made

the sounding cataract
Haunt him like a passion;

and had justified his prayer and hope, as he meditates gratefully on the choir of Poets:

who on earth have made us heirs
Of truth and pure delight by heavenly lays!
Oh! might my name be numbered among theirs,
Then gladly would I end my mortal days.[21]

There are poets whose works are each a body of literature in itself; and Wordsworth is of them. Though I have dared to touch various keys in his mighty organ, I have refrained from a hundred more. With many a grieving look back, I have passed the Yarrows by, the vision of the Girl of Inversneyde, the Sonnet's sonnet, the overflowing music of Brougham Castle's welcome to its Shepherd Lord, the high-minded farewell to the 'wondrous Potentate' of Eildon's triple height, the dramatic force and generous appeal of Hart-leap Well, the pathos of the improvised requiem on departed fellows in song, the grace and the passion of Laodamia, wild-flower Ruth, and the golden Duddon chain, with numberless things of beauty and wisdom besides. Single pieces, like the great Ode, are matter for entire volumes. Together they reflect the whole poetry of life as lived, and as it ought to be lived. In that unison I find in effect an explanation of the common indifference to Wordsworth's later verse. He mixed so much of his self-communings, the conviction of his obligation to rebuke, reform, and teach, that the Poet often was lost to view in the Preacher. Is it too much to assume that to it also, to the absolute identity of the man and his inspiration, the indefinable magic of the earlier poetry must be traced! Nowhere in the English Helicon is it harder to track home the fascination, by so much as it is always harder to analyse an author than his book. When, however, it can be done, and is done, when, as in the morning of life, the poet poured his whole soul into his verse, when he followed after every aspiration with the ardour of a

lover as well as the patience of a teacher, when he arrayed each in diction as lovely as it is simple, I do not wonder that the best of the nation's youth rallied to his bugle call. Even from the far distance, believe me, its echoes enchant. Let any submit themselves honestly to the spell, and they will understand.

The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth. Edward Moxon, 1847.

[1] Three Years she Grew in Sun and Shower (Poems of the Imagination, X).

[2] Lucy (Poems of the Affections, VIII).

[3] She was a Phantom of Delight (Poems of the Imagination, VIII).

[4] The Solitary Reaper (Memorials of a Tour in Scotland, IX).

[5] To a Nightingale (Poems of the Imagination, IX).

[6] To a Skylark (ibid., XXX).

[7] The Green Linnet (Poems of the Fancy, IX).

[8] Daffodils (Poems of the Imagination, XII).

[9] Composed upon Westminster Bridge, Sept. 3, 1802 (Miscellaneous Sonnets, Part II, xxxvi).

[10] Sonnet (Miscellaneous Sonnets, Part I, xxxiii).

[11] Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood. Ode, stanzas 2, 5, 9, and 11.

[12] Peter Bell, Part I, stanzas 12 and 15 (Poems of the Imagination).

[13] The Excursion, Book IV.

[14] Simon Lee, the Old Huntsman, st. 12 (Poems of Sentiment and Reflection, VI).

[15] The Affliction of Margaret, st. 11 (Poems founded on the Affections, XXIV).

[16] Character of the Happy Warrior (Poems of Sentiment and Reflection, XX).

[17] London, 1802 (Poems dedicated to National Independence, XIV).

[18] At the Grave of Burns, 1803, st. 6 (Memorials of a Tour in Scotland, II).

[19] Written in March, and Beggars (Poems of the Imagination, XVI and XVIII).

[20] Resolution and Independence, st. 20 (ibid., XXII).

[21] Personal Talk, st. 4 (Poems of Sentiment and Reflection, XIII).

SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE

1772—1834

WHAT a poet but for the metaphysician!

A poet feels; a metaphysician reasons. The one leaps; the other digs. Without imagination, the one cannot breathe; and the other cannot guess at the direction of a vein of thought. But for the poet, it is life; for the metaphysician, a stimulant. In the same mind the two tendencies conflict, unless one consent to serve. To his friends and the Highgate circle Coleridge was the more signal marvel because he united both. For posterity he would have been a profounder philosopher had he been less of a poet. Had he concerned himself less with the solution of mental problems, he must have filled a wider, not a more exalted, space in the history of poetry.

His positive poetical career was brief. The quantity of his work in the period is moderate. Virtually the whole bears an unmistakable stamp of high intelligence and noble feeling. Religious Musings abound in grand images and reflections; as, for instance, on the folly of hatred within our Heavenly Father's vast human family:

> No Cain
> Injures uninjured—in her best aim'd blow
> Victorious murder a blind suicide;

with the converse, in the lines immediately preceding, which Lamb declared to be 'without a rival in the whole compass of my poetical reading':

There is one Mind, one omnipresent Mind,
Omnific. His most holy name is Love.
Truth of subliming import! with the which
Who feeds and saturates his constant soul,
He from his small particular orbit flies
With blest outstarting! From himself he flies,
Stands in the sun, and with no partial gaze
Views all creation; and he loves it all,
And blesses it, and calls it very good!
This is indeed to dwell with the Most High!
Cherubs and rapture-trembling Seraphim
Can press no nearer to the Almighty's Throne:[1]

and The Eolian Harp, in its author's belief, 'the most perfect poem he ever wrote':

Such a soft floating witchery of sound
As twilight Elfins make, when they at eve
Voyage on gentle gales from Fairy-land!
O the one life within us and abroad,
Which meets all motion and becomes its soul,
A light in sound, a sound-like power in light,
Rhythm in all thought, and joyance everywhere![2]

No subtlety, the most intricate, daunts his Muse, when the theme crosses her path; not even David Hartley's Aether, with its

fluids, impacts, essences,
Self-working tools, uncaused effects, and all
Those blind omniscients, those almighty slaves,
Untenanting creation of its God.[3]

A reader stands amazed at the more than equal courage of the Ne Plus Ultra:

Sole Positive of Night!
Antipathist of Light!
Fate's only essence! primal scorpion rod—
The one permitted opposite of God!—

Condensed blackness and abysmal storm
Compacted to one sceptre
Arms the Grasp enorm—
The Intercepter—
The Substance that still casts the shadow Death !—
The Dragon foul and fell—
The unrevealable,
And hidden one, whose breath
Gives wind and fuel to the fires of Hell !—
Ah ! sole despair
Of both th' eternities in Heaven !
Sole interdict of all-bedewing prayer,
The all-compassionate !
Save to the Lampads Seven
Reveal'd to none of all th' Angelic State,
Save to the Lampads Seven,
That watch the throne of Heaven ! [4]

Notwithstanding the encroaching waves even here of wrangling politics, the Ode to the Departing Year is a relief to the brain, with its invocation :

O Albion ! O my mother Isle !
Thy valleys, fair as Eden's bowers,
Glitter green with sunny showers ;
Thy grassy uplands' gentle swells
Echo to the bleat of flocks—
Those grassy hills, those glittering dells
Proudly ramparted with rocks—
And Ocean mid his uproar wild
Speaks safety to his island-child.
Hence for many a fearless age
Has social Quiet loved thy shore ;
Nor ever proud invader's rage
Or sack'd thy towers, or stain'd thy fields with gore.[5]

Often too sensitive an imagination seems to be seeking refuge in any casual topic from thoughts, like Fears in Solitude, too troubling. The theme may be simple landscape-painting ; moor and farmland :

The fruit-like perfume of the golden furze;
This burst of prospect, here the shadowy main,
Dim-tinted, there the mighty majesty
Of that huge amphitheatre of rich
And elmy fields; [6]

forest-scenery, where

with dun-red bark
The fir-trees, and the unfrequent slender oak,
Forth from this tangle wild of bush and brake
Soar up, and form a melancholy vault
High o'er me, murmuring like a distant sea; [7]

an effect of frost at midnight, with its quiet which may be felt:

'Tis calm indeed! so calm, that it disturbs
And vexes meditation with its strange
And extreme silentness. Sea, hill, and wood,
This populous village! sea, and hill, and wood,
With all the numberless goings-on of life,
Inaudible as dreams! [8]

a Knight's Tomb, conjured up with the elegance of a Greek epigram, on a Westmoreland hill-side:

Where is the grave of Sir Arthur O'Kellyn?
Where may the grave of that good man be?—
By the side of a spring, on the breast of Helvellyn,
Under the twigs of a young birch tree!
The oak that in summer was sweet to hear,
And rustled its leaves in the fall of the year,
And whistled and roar'd in the winter alone,
Is gone—and the birch in its stead is grown.—
The Knight's bones are dust, and his good sword rust:—
His soul is with the saints, I trust. [9]

a picture of a mother with a new-born babe:

She listen'd to the tale divine,
And closer still the Babe she prest;
And while she cried, the Babe is mine!
The milk rush'd faster to her breast:
Joy rose within her, like a summer's morn;
Peace, Peace on Earth! the Prince of Peace is born;[10]

ideal vers de société, such as:

I ask'd my fair one happy day,
What I should call her in my lay;
By what sweet name from Rome or Greece;
Lalage, Neæra, Chloris,
Sappho, Lesbia, or Doris,
Arethusa, or Lucrece;

'Ah!' replied my gentle fair,
'Beloved, what are names but air?
Choose thou whatever suits the line;
Call me Sappho, call me Chloris,
Call me Lalage or Doris,
Only, only call me thine;'[11]

epigrams in swarms, political, social, merry, malicious, raging sometimes, as the terrible scream at Pitt in Fire, Famine, and Slaughter;[12] even sonorous sonnets, for example, on Schiller's[13] Robbers, and on Kosciuszko:

O what a loud and fearful shriek was there,
As though a thousand souls one death-groan pour'd!
Ah me! they saw beneath a hireling's sword
Their Kosciusko fall![14]

Then there is a sketch, the Three Graves, which its author had not the heart to complete; a thing shorn of all comeliness; squalidly tragic and cruel; wonderful in its harsh force:

'O God, forgive me,' he exclaim'd;
'I have torn out her heart!'[15]

but a nightmare, which we are glad to forget in the sunshine of

An Idyll with Boccaccio's spirit warm.[16]

Imagination has transported the Georgian poet four long centuries back to a fate-defying 'Garden and its faery'; to

The brightness of the world, O thou once free,
And always fair, rare land of courtesy!
O Florence! with the Tuscan fields and hills,
And famous Arno, fed with all their rills;
Thou brightest star of star-bright Italy!
Rich, ornate, populous, all treasures thine,
The golden corn, the olive, and the vine.
Fair cities, gallant mansions, castles old,
And forests, where beside his leafy hold
The sullen boar hath heard the distant horn,
And whets his tusks against the gnarled thorn;
Palladian palace with its storied halls;
Fountains, where Love lies listening to their falls;
Gardens, where flings the bridge its airy span,
And Nature makes her happy home with man;
Where many a gorgeous flower is duly fed
With its own rill, on its own spangled bed.—
Thine all delights, and every muse is thine;
And, more than all, the embrace and intertwine
Of all with all in gay and twinkling dance!
Mid gods of Greece and warriors of romance,
See! Boccace sits, unfolding on his knees
The new-found roll of old Maeonides;
But from his mantle's fold, and near the heart,
Peers Ovid's holy book of Love's sweet smart.[17]

The tale of Coleridge's achievements in verse is, however, far from told yet. He could do anything with verse. If he did not compose an epic, we may be sure it was not because he could not. If his few songs are not perfect music,

it is that he would not sing without thinking. He produced plays, which are poems also; ideal translations, the Piccolomini and the Death of Wallenstein; and—besides prodigies which I am holding over in reserve—three great Odes.

That to France,

> a solemn music of the wind,

is a proud declaration of the superiority of his loyal faith in Freedom to disenchantment by the greediness of renegades seduced, as had been Frenchmen,

> To mix with Kings in the low lust of sway,
> Yell in the hunt, and share the murderous prey.[18]

No dithyramb on the overwhelming glory of Alpine peaks has ever surpassed in splendour of diction his Hymn to Mont Blanc. It is immaterial that he was indebted for an outline of the poem to an obscure German poetess. That he had never seen the mountain or valley gave additional freedom to his enthusiasm. As it is, the conception moves apart on a high level from which it never descends:

> Sole sovran of the Vale!
> O struggling with the darkness all the night,
> And visited all night by troops of stars,
> Or when they climb the sky or when they sink:
> Companion of the morning-star at dawn,
> Thyself Earth's rosy star, and of the dawn
> Co-herald; wake, O wake, and utter praise!
> Who sank thy sunless pillars deep in Earth?
> Who fill'd thy countenance with rosy light?
> Who made thee parent of perpetual streams?
>
> And you, ye five wild torrents fiercely glad!
> Who call'd you forth from night and utter death,
> From dark and icy caverns call'd you forth,
> Down those precipitous, black, jagged Rocks,
> For ever shatter'd and the same for ever?

Ye ice-falls ! Ye that from the mountain's brow
Adown enormous ravines slope amain—
Torrents, methinks, that heard a mighty voice,
And stopp'd at once amid their maddest plunge !
Motionless torrents ! silent cataracts !
Who made you glorious as the gates of Heaven
Beneath the keen full moon ? Who bade the sun
Clothe you with rainbows ? Who, with living flowers
Of loveliest blue, spread garlands at your feet ?—
God ! let the torrents, like a shout of nations,
Answer ! and let the ice-plains echo, God ! [19]

The perfection of stateliness, though pitched too entirely in one key ! Yet not comparable, either for harmony or for thought, to the Ode to Dejection. Can that be given higher praise than that it is worthy to rank beside the Intimations of Immortality in the forefront of philosophical verse ! If the scope is necessarily far less large, and as necessarily the prospect is darker, the narrower plan is as exactly balanced ; any propensity to rhetoric is as well restrained. The melody, of which alone I can in a fragment give an idea, is always admirable :

What a scream
Of agony by torture lengthen'd out
That lute sent forth ! Thou Wind, that ravest without,
Bare crag, or mountain-tairn, or blasted tree,
Or pine grove whither woodman never clomb,
Or lonely house, long held the witches' home,
Methinks were fitter instruments for thee,
Mad Lutanist ! who in this month of showers,
Of dark-brown gardens, and of peeping flowers,
Mak'st Devils' Yule, with worse than wintry song,
The blossoms, buds, and timorous leaves among.
Thou Actor, perfect in all tragic sounds !
Thou mighty Poet, even to frenzy bold !
What tell'st thou now about ?
'Tis of the rushing of a host in rout,

With groans of trampled men, with smarting wounds—
At once they groan with pain, and shudder with the cold!
But hush! there is a pause of deepest silence!
And all that noise, as of a rushing crowd,
With groans and tremulous shudderings—all is over—
It tells another tale, with sounds less deep and loud!
A tale of less affright,
And temper'd with delight,
As Otway's self had framed the tender lay,
'Tis of a little child
Upon a lonesome wild,
Not far from home, but she hath lost her way;
And now moans low in bitter grief and fear,
And now screams loud, and hopes to make her mother hear.[20]

I recognize the touch of greatness everywhere: the abounding flood of majestic thought and imagery, which enraptured friends, and bewildered them no less than foes. It is possible to dissect piece after piece, and demonstrate the grandeur, the beauty. But the common reader of poetry who, like myself, reads poems to find out which of them he can love, is not drawn irresistibly back. These noble Odes, Hymns, Musings, Sonnets, even Epigrams, and jeux d'esprit are not in general of the poetry with which we care to live. And why?

Defects are visible on the surface of many. Often it is preaching instead of singing. Extraneous currents of thought are permitted to encroach. Indignation, in itself righteous, may be inopportune. It roars with a noisiness which fatigues. The fault is as in penmanship, when the upstroke and downstroke are equally dark. A suspicion is excited, as in the Chamouni Pindaric, that the eagle is flapping his wings to gain impetus for the flight heavenwards. Imagination itself effloresces into a confusing exuberance—fancy upon fancy—reflection upon reflection. The congeries is rather material for poetry than poetry

itself. Poems by other writers have, it is true, maintained their place in popular estimation in the face of drawbacks as considerable. But in Coleridge I cannot but suppose that they grew out of an essential misconception by him of the rights of verse over the versifier. Poetry demands the choicest of a man's powers; if great powers, the greatest, and all of them. He should have a will, and the will to mass the whole, and throw it into the lap of his theme. Coleridge had no sufficient sincerity in his vocation, no full conviction of the supreme obligations of the poet's mantle. Nature had bestowed the gift of verse upon him as his proper mode of expression ; and he used it as lightly as he came by it. Apparently he was not conscious that there is agony as well as rapture in the due utterance of such a voice. A reader like myself is liable to the distasteful feeling that he has had offered to him a series of exercises instead of inspired messages ; that they represent the obedience of a marvellous assemblage of human energies to their lord and master, and not the empire of his poetic spirit over himself.

The surprise is to turn a page, and be in a new world. Suddenly, with no audible herald to announce the advent, English literature found enshrined in it The Rime of the Ancient Mariner, Christabel, though delayed in publication, The Tale of the Dark Ladie, The Nightingale, and—belated like Christabel—Kubla-Khan. Each differs in feeling, thought, tone, rhythm, from the rest ; and all agree in being great, sweet, and satisfying. The Ancient Mariner is remarkable for more than its intrinsic merits ; it is phenomenal as being from Coleridge. Never was there poet or thinker with a fondness like his for vagueness, ragged ends. Nothing of that is here ; not one incident, nor one emotion, out of season and place ; and the tempta-

tions to wandering! An infinite variety of scene, character, impulses, terror, horror, romance, awe, remorse, repentance, hope, disappointment, the blissful calm of Heaven's pardon; and throughout the whole a captivating simplicity!

I know of no poem with more of the divine endowment of never growing out of date; none which possesses more of charm alike for age and youth. The melody of the dirge sung by seraphs in token of forgiveness for the fate of the Mariner's two hundred shipmates, haunts and enchants. It is like balm on an aching wound:

'Twas not those souls that fled in pain,
Which to their corses came again,
But a troop of spirits blest;

For when it dawn'd—they dropp'd their arms,
And cluster'd round the mast:
Sweet sounds rose slowly through their mouths,
And from their bodies pass'd.

Around, around, flew each sweet sound,
Then darted to the Sun;
Slowly the sounds came back again,
Now mix'd, now one by one.

Sometimes a-dropping from the sky
I heard the skylark sing;
Sometimes all little birds that are,
How they seem'd to fill the sea and air
With their sweet jargoning!

And now 'twas like all instruments,
Now like a lonely flute;
And now it is an angel's song,
That makes the heavens be mute.

It ceas'd; yet still the sails made on
A pleasant noise till noon,
A noise like of a hidden brook
In the leafy month of June,
That to the sleeping woods all night
Singeth a quiet tune.[21]

Had the Rime stood alone it must have immortalized its writer; but the same year or two which produced it brought to light the earlier and more important portion of Christabel. That is a poem for poets. Yet The Ancient Mariner, which might have been supposed made to compel popular admiration, lay practically stillborn until the twin inspiration, printed nineteen years later, called it into acknowledged life. The two resemble one another in nothing except loveliness. The variety which distinguishes Christabel has no affinity to that of its coeval in birth. Every diverse current in The Ancient Mariner sets towards one inevitable end. In Christabel there is no necessity to work in any given direction. Never had a rich and capricious fancy more liberty. Never did apparent trust in chance better justify its independence. Fancy rules; as irresponsible as the swaying of a leafy bough. The result is harmony, nevertheless; perfection in thought, images, new and fascinating flexibility of rhythm.

It might almost be supposed that the poet was improvising, and as uncertain as his audience of each next musical effect till it came:

> It moan'd as near as near can be,
> But what it is she cannot tell.—
> On the other side it seems to be
> Of the huge, broad-breasted, old oak tree.
>
> The night is chill; the forest bare;
> Is it the wind that moaneth bleak?
> There is not wind enough in the air
> To move away the ringlet curl
> From the lovely lady's cheek—
> There is not wind enough to twirl
> The one red leaf, the last of its clan,
> That dances as often as dance it can,
> Hanging so light, and hanging so high,
> On the topmost twig that looks up at the sky.

Hush, beating heart of Christabel!
Jesu, Maria! shield her well!
She folded her arms beneath her cloak,
And stole to the other side of the oak.
What sees she there?

There she sees a damsel bright,
Drest in a silken robe of white,
That shadowy in the moonlight shone;
The neck that made that white robe wan,
Her stately neck and arms were bare;
Her blue-veined feet unsandal'd were,
And wildly glitter'd here and there
The gems entangled in her hair.
I guess, 'twas frightful there to see
A lady so richly clad as she—
Beautiful exceedingly![22]

And again the wonderful, changeful melody:

'In the touch of this bosom there worketh a spell,
Which is lord of thy utterance, Christabel!
Thou knowest to-night, and wilt know to-morrow,
This mark of my shame, this seal of my sorrow;
But vainly thou warrest,
For this is alone in
Thy power to declare,
That in the dim forest
Thou heard'st a low moaning,
And found'st a bright lady surpassingly fair;
And didst bring her home with thee in love and in charity,
To shield her and shelter her from the damp air.'[23]

Christabel and The Ancient Mariner have their several stations; fixed stars in the heaven of letters. One is a masterpiece of art, which foils all attempts to detect the secret of its workmanship. The other is so entrancing in its unison of heart and brain, that its captives are never free to inquire whether there be a secret at all. If proof

be still wanting of the perfection of Christabel, it is that true criticism has never regretted its incompleteness. Well that it remains a torso incomparable !

I have classed with them three other poems ; and they all deserve their eminence. First must stand the wondrous Vision—like Christabel, a fragment. Execrable, unpardonable, the ' business person from Porlock ', who stifled two hundred or more golden dream-lines of Kubla-Khan ! A great master of fiction, and a poet too, as we walked up the hill at the foot of which, alas ! he no longer dwells, once told me that he ranked Kubla-Khan highest among Coleridge's poems. It was a paradox, though so far literally true that the dreamer of such a dream is demonstrated thereby to have had poetry in his very blood !

The melody bubbles, dances, revels, laments, and threatens :

> But oh ! that deep romantic chasm which slanted
> Down the green hill athwart a cedarn cover !
> A savage place ! as holy and enchanted
> As e'er beneath a waning moon was haunted
> By woman wailing for her demon-lover !
> And from this chasm, with ceaseless turmoil seething,
> As if this earth in fast thick pants were breathing,
> A mighty fountain momently was forced ;
> Amid whose swift half-intermitted burst
> Huge fragments vaulted like rebounding hail,
> Or chaffy grain beneath the thresher's flail ;
> And 'mid these dancing rocks at once and ever
> If flung up momently the sacred river.
> Five miles meandering with a mazy motion
> Through wood and dale the sacred river ran,
> Then reach'd the caverns measureless to man,
> And sank in tumult to a lifeless ocean ;
> And 'mid this tumult Kubla heard from far
> Ancestral voices prophesying war ! [24]

By turns it falls, and, again, rises into an Abyssinian maid's song of Mount Abora, with palaces built of sunshine, over caverns of ice, and yielding delights ineffably seductive and perilous.

A dizzy singing trance! Yet hardly less of common daylight texture than the exquisite Conversational Poem, with its rivalries of many nightingales amid tangled wild woods, interpreted in blank verse honey-sweet:

> Far and near,
> In wood and thicket, over the wide grove,
> They answer and provoke each other's songs,
> With skirmish and capricious passagings,
> And murmurs musical and swift jug jug,
> And one low piping sound more sweet than all—
> Stirring the air with such an harmony,
> That should you close your eyes, you might almost
> Forget it was not day! On moonlight bushes,
> Whose dewy leafits are but half-disclosed,
> You may perchance behold them on the twigs,
> Their bright, bright eyes, their eyes both bright and full,
> Glistening, while many a glow-worm in the shade
> Lights up her love-torch.
> A most gentle Maid,
> Who dwelleth in her hospitable home
> Hard by the castle, and knows all their notes,
> What time the moon was lost behind a cloud,
> Hath heard a pause of silence; till the moon
> Emerging, hath awaken'd earth and sky
> With one sensation, and those wakeful birds
> Have all burst forth in choral minstrelsy,
> As if some sudden gale had swept at once
> A hundred airy harps! And she hath watch'd
> Many a nightingale perch giddily
> On blosmy twig still swinging from the breeze,
> And to that motion tune his wanton song,
> Like tipsy joy that reels with tossing head.[25]

As worthy, still once more, of a place in the hierarchy of song, is the Introduction to the Ballad of The Dark Ladie. The ballad, like Christabel, is a fragment; but the prelude, on the variety of ministers that Love can enlist—even 'a soft and doleful air, an old and moving story'—is as complete in beauty and colour as a rose:

All impulses of soul and sense
Had thrill'd my guileless Genevieve;
The music and the doleful tale,
The rich and balmy eve;

And hopes, and fears that kindle hope,
An undistinguishable throng,
And gentle wishes long subdued,
Subdued and cherish'd long!

She wept with pity and delight,
She blush'd with love, and virgin shame;
And, like the murmur of a dream,
I heard her breathe my name.

Her bosom heav'd—she stepp'd aside,
As conscious of my look she stepp'd—
Then suddenly, with timorous eye,
She fled to me and wept.

She half inclosed me with her arms,
She press'd me with a meek embrace;
And bending back her head, look'd up,
And gazed upon my face.

'Twas partly love, and partly fear,
And partly 'twas a bashful art,
That I might rather feel than see
The swelling of her heart.[26]

Coleridge's career as a writer of poetry terminated by the time he was thirty. The body of his poetical work is comprised within three to five years. Had he died in

1802, after the composition of the Ode to Dejection, he would have left the world of poetry as rich as when he finally departed. As a thinker he survived, and reigned, for thirty-two years more. Inspiration ceases for most in middle life. Few, once inspired, cease, while they breathe, from versifying. They versify because verse was wont to be their highest mental medium and instrument. Coleridge, when no longer minded to write Ancient Mariners and Christabels, had an alternative. He remained an intellectual autocrat, and proceeded to utilize his other gift, as a suggester of problems, a setter of texts. If literature cannot be said to have benefited by the soliloquies at Highgate, at least it has gained negatively by the escape through that safety-valve for imagination from the danger of a dilution of poetic greatness. Having tasted of Coleridge's best, we should all of us have been grievous sufferers had we been obliged to put up with aught lower. Better nothing if no more of Christabel, or her peers !

The Poetical and Dramatic Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Four vols. B. M. Pickering, 1877.

[1] Religious Musings, vol. i, pp. 93–4; and Lamb to Coleridge, Dec. 10, 1796. Memorials of Charles Lamb, by Talfourd. Moxon, 1850, p. 59.

[2] The Eolian Harp.

[3] The Destiny of Nations.

[4] Ne Plus Ultra (Sibylline Leaves).

[5] Ode to the Departing Year.

[6] Fears in Solitude.

[7] The Picture.

[8] Frost at Midnight.

[9] The Knight's Tomb (Sibylline Leaves).

[10] A Christmas Carol (Sibylline Leaves), st. 3.

[11] Names (Sibylline Leaves).

[12] Fire, Famine, and Slaughter.

[13] To the Author of the Robbers.

[14] Kosciusko, Sonnets, V.

[15] The Three Graves (Sibylline Leaves).

[16] The Garden of Boccaccio.

[17] Ibid.

[18] France: an Ode. stanzas 1, 4.
[19] Hymn before Sunrise in the Vale of Chamouni (Sibylline Leaves)
[20] Dejection: an Ode (Sibylline Leaves).
[21] The Rime of the Ancient Mariner, Part v.
[22] Christabel, Part i. [23] Ibid.
[24] Kubla Khan; or, a Vision in a Dream.
[25] The Nightingale: a Conversational Poem.
[26] The Ballad of the Dark Ladie, Introduction.

ROBERT SOUTHEY

1774—1843

I WAS brought up to regard Southey as the peer of Coleridge, Wordsworth, Byron, Shelley, and Keats; not necessarily their equal in degree, but wholly worthy to be ranked among them. As a schoolboy, and as an undergraduate, I read him with respect, in some sort with admiration. When I became entitled to choose College prizes, a collection of his poems was in my list. My contemporaries would not have selected him; they did not think me eccentric for my preference. I have survived to find him utterly out of date, scarcely placed on an upper shelf with the Georgian classics. Even I myself had ceased to read him since my University days, unless when I wished to amuse my children with one of his ballads. Ghosts of old associations seemed to rustle down about me, like last year's leaves from a wind-tossed beech-tree in early spring, as more recently I turned over the many pages to try to discover why his verse was current once, and no longer passes.

The tide of neglect even has reached, if not to the full extent, the area of his verse in which he is indisputably a master. Few English poets are his equals, very few his superiors, in humour. Humour various and singular at once. Never mere fun, born with a laugh, and expiring in a yawn. Poetry also, though with sentiment not unbecomingly obtrusive. Above all, an infinite capacity for inventing occasions for itself, though from subject-matter the most unlikely. To give instances out of many as remarkable,

the opportunity may be supplied by a henpecked Cornishman, whose bride had unfairly taken to the church a bottle of the dominion-ensuring water, which he raced from the altar to be first to drink at the Well of St. Keyne.[1] It may be the natural anxiety of pious countrymen to secure for their village, by timely preliminaries—such as a deathbed—to Beatification, the relics of a Saint-designate, whom neighbours might otherwise coax away in life.[2] A mother's frenzy of anguish for her child devoured by a crocodile suggests a scene of revenge in kind, as equitable as it is irresistibly comic.[3] A flower of smiling satire springs under the poet's pen from the field of Blenheim, watered with the blood of murdered myriads :

> 'Why, 'twas a very wicked thing!'
> Said little Wilhelmine.
> 'Nay, nay, my little girl,' quoth he,
> 'It was a famous victory!'[4]

The theme may be a Pope's untold mortal sin, with a Saint's gallop on Satan's own unwilling back to confess and absolve,[5] or a robber's release from and restoration to his lawful gibbet.[6] Each is made to yield the best of diversion. Half a century ago everybody revelled in the wit of The Devil's Walk![7] There were few who had not both shuddered and laughed over Archbishop Hatto and his rats,[8] and the gallant, futile fight with her registered purchaser, the Arch-Fiend, of The Old Woman of Berkeley in her iron-sealed and chained coffin, hymned and hallowed by fifty Choristers and fifty Priests, with, for sentinels, her son a monk, and her daughter a nun :

> In he came with eyes of flame
> The Devil to fetch the dead,
> And all the Church with his presence glow'd,
> Like a fiery furnace red.

He laid his hand on the iron chains,
And like flax they moulder'd asunder,
And the coffin lid, which was barr'd so firm,
He burst with his voice of thunder.

And he bade the Old Woman of Berkeley rise,
And come with her master away:
A cold sweat started on that cold corpse,
At the voice she was forced to obey.

She rose on her feet in her winding-sheet,
Her dead flesh quiver'd with fear,
And a groan like that which the Old Woman gave
Never did mortal hear.

She follow'd her Master to the church door,
There stood a black horse there;
His breath was red like furnace smoke,
His eyes like a meteor's glare.

The Devil he flung her on the horse,
And he leapt up before,
And away like the lightning's speed they went,
And she was seen no more.

They saw her no more, but her cries
For four miles round they could hear,
And children at rest at their mother's breast
Started, and scream'd with fear.[9]

As I now re-read, I do not know which to applaud more, the jester, the story-teller, or the Minstrel. The humour sometimes reminds a little too much of a skull's grin; the art with which it is extracted never fails; we always feel the fine sense of perspective with which the materials are marshalled to yield the desired effect.

But the indifference, which in its course has partially visited the Ballads and Metrical Tales, seems to have washed away, like Lethe, all remembrance of the serious poems. The degree of oblivion I cannot but think unjust,

and perhaps ungrateful. The mass of Southey's work displays qualities which were appreciated once, and may plead for some recognition still. In the first place his workmanship is excellent; with exceptions, naturally; especially, of the purveyance of Courtly or patriotic adulation; such as A Vision of Judgment, or the intolerably dreary Pilgrimage to Waterloo. Joan of Arc is a spacious chapter of history, with the rightful proportion, observed with a true instinct, of romance to fact. In the two Madocs, in Wales, and in Aztlan, he had to trust entirely to his fancy, for the general scheme, as well as for details. The whole is harmoniously probable. Roderick, the Last of the Goths, again, is, like Joan, an admirable specimen of historical joinery by a romancer with a conscience. Almost everything alleged to have happened had happened, or might have happened. Though liberties are taken with events, and their order, the properties are invariably correct, as is the scenery. It is impossible to live in the several narratives with their characters, and the sentiments attributed to them, without being the better for the society.

Then, study the couple of Asiatic epics; and admire the intrepidity with which the poet plunges into a new world. Throughout they are picturesque, and gorgeously coloured. Really it is hard to understand the present coldness towards Arabian Nights Entertainments such as these. Thalaba himself, it may be objected, lacks interest. In that he only resembles many another hero; and the vivacity of his adventures atones. At all events, the crime cannot be imputed to the story of Kehama.

It was no ordinary imagination which—though guided perhaps by the 'Rape of Lucrece'—extracted satisfaction of implacable revengefulness out of a Cain-like brand of security for its abhorred object from every peril to life:

I charm thy life
From the weapons of strife,
From stone and from wood,
From fire and from flood,
From the serpent's tooth,
And the beasts of blood:
From Sickness I charm thee,
And Time shall not harm thee:
But Earth which is mine,
Its fruits shall deny thee;
And Water shall hear me,
And know thee and fly thee;
And the Winds shall not touch thee
When they pass by thee,
And the Dews shall not wet thee,
When they fall nigh thee;
And thou shalt seek Death
To release thee, in vain;
Thou shalt live in thy pain
While Kehama shall reign,
With a fire in thy heart,
And a fire in thy brain;
And Sleep shall obey me,
And visit thee never,
And the Curse shall be on thee
For ever and ever.[10]

The entire texture may not reach the same high standard. But all the actors move in an atmosphere of poetic passion. It invests the King of the World, and his victims also. It circulates about the ghastly figure of his dead brutish son. Everything is on a grand scale; from the insatiable ambition of the mighty Rajah; the pursuit of innocent Kailyal by the horrible Spectre, carnal though a ghost, of slain Arvalan; the hall of Royal Death in the peerless palace and gardens,

Where Baly held of old his awful reign;

to the climax, the storming of Hell itself by the Man-God, the Man-Almighty, his chief and fatal conquest.

Other keys besides the heroic are touched by Southey; the marvellous; and the sordidly criminal, as in the once famous Mary, the Maid of the Inn—a haunting horror.[11] I fail to recognize the magical reserve, the pensive charm, of Collins's Evening in The First of December:

> When Nature shrouds herself, entranced
> In deep tranquillity.[12]

Hannah's grave, however, where none

> Who trod upon the senseless turf would think
> Of what a world of woes lay buried there,[13]

vies with The Parish Register and The Borough in the power to elicit an acrid fragrance from the grime of sin and its sorrow. With a sweet simplicity he welcomes the return of travellers to their home and children.[14] He preceded Tennyson in the discovery of the domestic idyll, as The Old Mansion-House testifies.[15] If only his best suggested examples had been given to the world, he might have won celebrity for Inscriptions—free, all, from the besetting sin of promiscuous adulation—like that imagined for a monument to ruthless Pizarro:

> A greater name
> The list of Glory boasts not.—
> Thank the God
> Who made thee, that thou art not such as he.[16]

When in the Paradise of his books, it will not be disputed that at least the shadow of inspiration falls upon him:

> My days among the Dead are past;
> Around me I behold,
> Where'er these casual eyes are cast,
> The mighty minds of old;
> My never-failing friends are they,
> With whom I converse day by day.

With them I take delight in weal,
And seek relief in woe;
And while I understand and feel
How much to them I owe,
My cheeks have often been bedew'd
With tears of thoughtful gratitude.

My thoughts are with the Dead, with them
I live in long-past years,
Their virtues love, their faults condemn,
Partake their hopes and fears,
And from their lessons seek and find
Instruction with an humble mind.

My hopes are with the Dead, anon
My place with them will be,
And I with them shall travel on
Through all Futurity;
Yet leaving here a name, I trust,
That will not perish in the dust.[17]

So, too, when he lifts his Muse into purer air, and lulls the terrors of Kehama's victims by reminding of the immortality of Love; of its perfecting in Heaven:

They sin who tell us Love can die.
With life all other passions fly,
All others are but vanity.
In Heaven Ambition cannot dwell,
Nor Avarice in the vaults of Hell;
Earthly these passions of the Earth,
They perish where they have their birth;
But Love is indestructible.
Its holy flame for ever burneth,
From Heaven it came, to Heaven returneth;
Too oft on Earth a troubled guest,
At times deceived, at times oppress,
It here is tried and purified,
Then hath in Heaven its perfect rest;
It soweth here with toil and care
But the harvest time of Love is there.[18]

If his right—which I am afraid I have myself not very enthusiastically upheld—to exalted poetical rank is not at present generally acknowledged, the failure arises from no faint-heartedness, or excess of modesty, in him. He has claimed it by work, and even by word. He delighted in the composition of poetry, whether grave or gay, lyric or epic, recondite, or simple, even commonplace. Versifying was his recreation, and his solace. His dearest friends were poets. Illustrious members of the brotherhood hailed him as of it. Byron himself, while he jeered, did not deny him a place in the company. Among all his vocations that was the one by which he meant to be recollected; if in that,

> but self-approved, to praise or blame
> Indifferent, while I toil for lasting fame.[19]

He had won honours in many fields of literature; but the title of poet was the chief distinction he challenged; and how refuse it to the generous, kindly, indefatigable, brave, and honourable man, to the student and scholar, to the creator of Thalaba and Kehama? Clearly we cannot. The fact nevertheless remains that the poems by which he expected to be immortalized are neither read nor honoured. He might have been amused by the knowledge that lines from the Devil's Walk have been incorporated into the language; that every school-girl can rehearse in a cataract of rhymes the way in which

> the water comes down at Lodore;[20]

I do not suppose he would have accepted the compliment as compensation, or been at all better able to explain to himself why posterity is oblivious of Roderick, Madoc, and A Tale of Paraguay.

As I have already intimated, it is indeed difficult to

account fully for the neglect in its excess. There are reasons on the surface. To begin, I must admit a want of quality, a certain coarseness of fabric. Again, the bulk is a discouragement, as is the extent of a strange lake to an angler. He may be sure that it contains fish, without being able to tell where they lie. Similarly these vast epics hide valuable ideas, only to be chanced by a reader out of an overwhelming flood of truisms. The interest in others is alien and remote. From the first it required to be bolstered up by Oriental learning, much of it, in these times of deeper research, musty and rusty. But, in the face of works, some earlier, and more later, which have conquered public favour notwithstanding analogous drawbacks every whit as prejudicial, the poet might well argue that such attempts at an explanation are insufficient. I do not flatter myself that he would be at all better inclined to accept mine ;—that the cause is his failure throughout to forge from the furnace within himself a chain of sympathy with his readers. That, however, I believe to be the true one. He seldom seems to connect their and his common human nature. Note how rarely, if ever, his verse makes tears to start to the eyelids. The chill from this absence of mutual glow is positive, palpable, and fatal. Never will the emotions of a poet's readers, charm he never so wisely, take fire unless from the kindling of fuel in the singer's own breast. Southey's Muse was devoid of the passion of sympathy ; and his renown suffers in consequence.

He possessed many of the endowments by which admirers are attracted. He was without that which holds them bound. It could not well have been otherwise with a writer who resorted to poetry as a recreation, for rest from the toils of his literary treadmill. He understood the art of it, and could call on it, when he chose, to do

his bidding. It was his handmaid when it should have been his mistress. A thousand pities! He missed the dearest object of his ambition; and we have lost what might have been, from that richly furnished nature, some inspired strains. As it was, he could not be a great poet; but he had a lofty soul; and he was a great man of letters.

The Poetical Works of Robert Southey. Complete in one volume New edition. Longmans, 1853.

[1] The Well of St. Keyne (Ballads and Metrical Tales).
[2] St. Romuald (Ballads, &c.).
[3] The King of the Crocodiles (Ballads, &c.)
[4] The Battle of Blenheim (Ballads, &c.).
[5] True Ballad of St. Antidius, the Pope, and the Devil (Ballads, &c.)
[6] Roprecht the Robber (Ballads, &c.).
[7] The Devil's Walk.
[8] God's Judgement on a Wicked Bishop (Ballads, &c.)
[9] The Old Woman of Berkeley (Ballads, &c.).
[10] The Curse of Kehama, Part II, xiv.
[11] Mary, the Maid of the Inn (Ballads, &c.).
[12] Written on the First of December (Lyric Poems)
[13] Hannah (English Eclogues).
[14] The Traveller's Return (Lyric Poems).
[15] The Old Mansion-House (English Eclogues).
[16] For a Column at Truxillo (Inscriptions, xiii)
[17] My Days among the Dead (Occasional Pieces, xviii).
[18] The Curse of Kehama.
[19] The Poet's Pilgrimage to Waterloo. Proem, st 21.
[20] The Cataract of Lodore (Nondescripts, VII).

SIR WALTER SCOTT

1771—1832

Scott was the least jealous of poets; else, he might have been jealous of himself. His genius dawned upon the world in poetry. As a poet he was recognized before Coleridge, Wordsworth, Byron, Shelley, Keats. Time went on, leaving him at each of its stages more and more eminent and popular. At each his fame in the specific department of poetry manifestly receded. The individuality of the author counts for more in poetry than in any other branch of literature. Never was writer more interesting for himself than Scott. His personal renown practically transferred the Court of Letters from London to Edinburgh. There he reigned, and in his own right always. The particular kind of literature on which the throne rested differed at different periods. It had been romance in metre. It became romance in prose. But the occupant always was King Walter. The poetry survived, though royal no longer. The poems have a hundredfold more readers than when they stirred the envy of the obscure bard of Hours of Idleness. Their claims as poetry have seldom been denied. Yet I am afraid that in general they are valued much less on their own account than on that of the man, and on account of him not so much as a poet as a storyteller.

For romantic fiction on the confines of history, he is indeed no less a master in verse than in prose. In one special department of poetical narration he is supreme.

I could not lay it down as an absolute condition of excellence in description that the theme shall be one in which the writer has always delighted. But undoubtedly it is added virtue in a poet otherwise well qualified, that he loves and has loved it. Scott would have liked to be a soldier. He rejoiced in everything connected with fighting. Never has British Poet, except Campbell on more contracted canvases, made the reader equally to feel, as in the Iliad, on a battle-field itself with its turmoil, its frenzy, its ecstasy. He was conscious of his gift, and freely used it.

There is the impress of genuineness on the picture of Bannockburn. Read, for instance, of the final and disastrous English charge over the pit-pitted plain :

Rushing, ten thousand horsemen came,
With spears in rest, and hearts on flame,
That panted for the shock !
With blazing crests and banners spread,
And trumpet-clang and clamour dread,
The wide plain thunder'd to their tread,
As far as Stirling rock.
Down ! Down ! in headlong overthrow,
Horsemen and horse, the foremost go,
Wild floundering on the field !
The first are in destruction's gorge,
Their followers wildly o'er them urge :—
The knightly helm and shield,
The mail, the acton, and the spear,
Strong hand, high heart, are useless here !
Loud from the mass confused the cry
Of dying warriors swells on high,
And steeds that shriek in agony !
They came like mountain-torrent red,
That thunders o'er its rocky bed ;
They broke like that same torrent's wave,
When swallowed by a darksome cave.

Billows on billows burst and boil,
Maintaining still the stern turmoil,
And to their wild and tortured groan
Each adds new terrors of his own![1]

Lifelike, again, is the glimpse of a later battle—Flodden—as fitfully descried by Marmion's Squires from a neighbouring hill-top:

They close, in clouds of smoke and dust,
With sword-sway, and with lance's thrust:
And such a yell was there,
Of sudden and portentous birth,
As if men fought upon the earth,
And fiends in upper air;
O life and death were in the shout,
Recoil and rally, charge and rout,
And triumph and despair.
At length the freshening western blast
Aside the shroud of battle cast;
And, first, the ridge of mingled spears
Above the brightening cloud appears;
And in the smoke the pennons flew,
As in the storm the white seamew;
Then mark'd they, dashing broad and far,
The broken billows of the war,
And plumèd crests of chieftains brave,
Floating like foam upon the wave;
But nought distinct they see.
Wide raged the battle on the plain;
Spears shook, and falchions flash'd amain;
Fell England's arrow-flight like rain;
Crests rose, and stoop'd, and rose again,
Wild and disorderly.[2]

All the incidents of warfare inflamed his Muse; if not a clash of battalions, an armed and perilous ambush. The blood stirs at the sudden apparition from heather and bracken of 'Clan Alpine's warriors true':

Wild as the scream of the curlew,
From crag to crag the signal flew.
Instant, through copse and heath, arose
Bonnets and spears and bended bows;
On right, on left, above, below,
Sprung up at once the lurking foe;
From shingles gray their lances start,
The bracken bush sends forth the dart,
The rushes and the willow-wand
Are bristling into axe and brand,
And every tuft of broom gives life
To plaided warrior arm'd for strife.
That whistle garrison'd the glen
At once with full five hundred men.
Watching their leader's beck and will,
All silent there they stood, and still.[3]

He was an equally glad interpreter of the pibroch of Donald Dhu, and of the proscribed and hunted Macgregors' owl's hoot:

Our signal for fight, that from monarchs we drew,
To be heard but by night in our vengeful haloo.[4]

In his case direct and long personal sympathy, not merely with the subject in general, but with its particular exemplifications, was virtually indispensable. Art for him did not supply its place in the least. Without it he is diffuse and dull. The spectacle, or expectation, of an exchange of hard blows had an aptitude for exciting his inspiration; but he had to be personally interested before even a pitched battle made a poem. Everything else—story-telling itself—is an accident in his poetry, except the personal emotion; and that responded fortunately to other themes besides arms. Touch the key, in his rich memory, of an ancient legend, an historic edifice; and lovely music pours forth. Nowhere has minster, from the glory of its prime to eloquent decay, revealed itself to an insight more delicate

and sympathetic than Melrose to his fancy bridging, as with a rainbow, four hundred years :

If thou would'st view fair Melrose aright,
Go visit it by the pale moonlight ;
For the gay beams of lightsome day
Gild, but to flout, the ruins gray.
When the broken arches are black in night,
And each shafted oriel glimmers white ;
When the cold light's uncertain shower
Streams on the ruin'd central tower ;
When buttress and buttress, alternately,
Seemed framed of ebon and ivory ;
When silver edges the imagery,
And the scrolls that teach thee to live and die ;
When distant Tweed is heard to rave,
And the owlet to hoot o'er the dead man's grave,
Then go—but go alone the while—
Then view St. David's ruin'd pile ;
And, home returning, soothly swear,
Was never scene so sad and fair ! [5]

His mind was a treasure-house of tradition and romance from which a poet's magic conjured up memorial funeral rites for drowned Rosabelle in the ancestral mausoleum :

O'er Roslin all that dreary night
A wondrous blaze was seen to gleam ;
'Twas broader than the watch-fire's light,
And redder than the bright moon-beam.

It glared on Roslin's castled rock,
It ruddied all the copse-wood glen,
'Twas seen from Dryden's groves of oak,
And seen from cavern'd Hawthornden.

Seem'd all on fire that chapel proud,
Where Roslin's chiefs uncoffin'd lie,
Each Baron, for a sable shroud,
Sheathed in his iron panoply.

Seem'd all on fire, within, around,
Deep sacristy, and altar's pale,
Shone every pillar foliage-bound,
And glimmer'd all the dead men's mail.

Blazed battlement and pinnet high,
Blazed every rose-carved buttress fair—
So still they blaze, when fate is nigh
The lordly line of high St. Clair.

There are twenty of Roslin's barons bold
Lie buried within that proud chapelle:
Each one the holy vault doth hold—
But the sea holds lovely Rosabelle![6]

And it was a poet's tyrant imagination in the grasp of the past which was needed to steel his heart for that tale of horror, the accurst monastic conclave in the murder-den of Holy Island, which makes one cry out upon the Fiend for not sparing perjured Marmion

but a day,
For wasting fire, and dying groan,
And priests slain on the altar-stone.[7]

I have left to the last that which might at once, and by itself, have established the Border Minstrel's title to a poet's laurel. Surely in the front rank of requiems stands that over Pitt and Fox. The two Titanic figures had filled the entire horizon of Scott's youth and early manhood; and the passion of his verse testifies to the impress on his nature. Yet never, like many of its class, does it foam into rhetoric, or rave into hysterics. It rises and falls like tidal waves. As the thought dwells on the broken health, and broken heart, of the mighty Minister, the melody is solemn and sad:

Had'st thou but liv'd, though stripp'd of power,
A watchman on the lonely tower,
Thy thrilling trump had roused the land,
When fraud or danger were at hand;

By thee, as by the beacon-light,
Our pilots had kept course aright;
As some proud column, though alone,
Thy strength had propp'd the tottering throne;
Now is the stately column broke,
The beacon-light is quench'd in smoke,
The trumpet's silver sound is still,
The warder silent on the hill! [8]

The dirge grows rejoicingly triumphal as it unites him and his rival in a common bond of renown and patriotism:

With more than mortal powers endow'd,
How high they soar'd above the crowd!
Theirs was no common party race,
Jostling by dark intrigue for place;
Like fabled gods, their mighty war
Shook realms and nations in its jar;
Beneath each banner proud to stand,
Looked up the noblest of the land,
Till through the British world were known
The names of Pitt and Fox alone.
Spells of such force no wizard grave
E'er framed in dark Thessalian cave.
These spells are spent, and, spent with these,
The wine of life is on the lees;
Genius, and taste, and talent gone,
For ever tomb'd beneath the stone,
Where—taming thought to human pride!—
The mighty chiefs sleep side by side.
Drop upon Fox's grave the tear,
'Twill trickle to his rival's bier;
O'er Pitt's the mournful requiem sound,
And Fox's shall the notes rebound.
The solemn echo seems to cry—
'Here let their discord with them die.
Speak not for these a separate doom,
Whom Fate made Brothers in the tomb;
But search the land of living men.
Where wilt thou find their like agen?' [9]

Throughout Scott's poems blemishes and defects abound without clouding his title to a poet's honours. He dilutes his descriptions often, and is careless in diction. Very seldom did he use pruning hook or file. No poet could be more slipshod. Much in the longer compositions may be fair story-telling, and is sure to be archaeologically instructive. It may even reach the level of a popular ballad. Assuredly it is not poetry. The facility, proverbially fatal, of the octosyllabic metre lured him into prolixity. Wide reading in many directions, and a memory for particular subjects practically boundless, contributed to tempt him to improvise. As he freely admitted, he was without the faculty of self-criticism. It is an invaluable incapacity during the process of poetical production; a very dangerous one in the subsequent period of reflection and revision. Among the results was that he accepted unsuspiciously whatever subject happened to present itself. For any, and especially for a metrical, story it is essential that the plot should possess enough intrinsic and glowing interest to stimulate reader and writer alike. With three he was fortunate. As mere tales The Lay of the Last Minstrel, Marmion, and The Lady of the Lake, fascinate. Bannockburn is not intimately enough connected with Bruce's wanderings among the Isles to lend adventures among them retrospective animation. Very few of the present generation have patience to trace the maze of Rokeby. In consequence a fine piece of character-drawing in Bertram, with his audacious escapes and death, has been wasted. The Bridal of Triermain, a bright garden of fancies, with its Arthurian atmosphere, is no more than a name, if that. Merlin would have to come to life again to revive it; and equally entombed, in spite of the sweep of grand flowing verse, is Harold the Dauntless.

Happily the finest three Epic-Ballads, or Ballad-Epics, in the language have outlived the discoverer, or rediscoverer, of the type, with no symptom about them of impending torpor or trance. To bear them company they maintain a body-guard of intimate preludes, and isolated bursts of music. Glenfinlas, The Eve of St. John, re-incarnations of Border Minstrelsy, re-inspired imitations of mystic German, and a spray of lyrics and dramatic fragments, are of the number. Scott, at his best, that is, when the subject has its source in his heart, soars upwards ; his whole nature is led captive by the poetic spirit ; all his powers are evidently its tributaries or ministers. The sagacity, humour, painstaking, wisdom, in which, while treading earth, he excelled, add substance to the rush of the winged mood of inspiration. Like his poetic fellows he had the instinct which, when itself captivated, pounces instantly upon the precise details required, upon the one virgin plot of earth fit for the imagination to cultivate. No Lowlander or Borderer before him had discovered romance in a Highland cateran. Who does not, even to excess, recognize it now ? Every great poet is a pioneer. Wordsworth was one ; and such, in archaic soil, was Scott. In the quality, and the energy to exercise it, he resembled his kind ; the specific line he followed was peculiarly his own, as were the weapons he employed.

He is an open-air poet, a poet of morning, not of night. In his most vehement dithyrambs he says outright what he means. Trickery he disdained. He never hunted after conceits. It is easy to understand how Ruskin, not being wholly free from them himself, should have loved to aerate his disciples' souls and his own with poetry like Scott's, where there are few or none. Some poetry is itself essence, a distillation of thought, of conclusions, from the writer's

mind. There is a sort, and Scott's is of it, in which the reader has to distil for himself. The born poet has collected, selected the materials; has himself been enraptured by the feeling, rather than expression, of their essence. It is the fault of his public if it cannot be so likewise. The inclination of the present age is towards having introspection and intellectual analysis done for it, and by its poets. To poetry it looks for problems, if not, necessarily, for the solutions. Scott does not deal in enigmas. In him it would have been affectation; and he is never affected. As he never poses as a Sphinx, so he pretends neither to be a child of nature, like Burns, nor a nature-worshipper, like Wordsworth. Yet his scenes are all, in their changeful diversity, constantly true and real. He does not attempt to hide his debt to libraries for very much in his narratives. He makes no parade of the equal truth that he has charmed the heart out of them; that in his verse it beats as it rarely beat before.

No golden haze floats over the poems of Scott. They apply no form of spiritual or sensuous intoxication. Only, when the imagination is elsewhere cloyed with sweetness, or has wearied of tying knots in the brain, when it longs for dancing breezes and fire, like the Homeric, it turns with relief to the Last Minstrel's Lay, to Marmion, to The Lady of the Lake. They re-enter into their rightful inheritance of hearthside favour. When they are duly understood, it will be seen also that they can reclaim something of worth as high; that is, property in the author himself. Scott the man is a possession that any province of literature may be proud to appropriate as primarily its own. Nobody can be surprised that the title to such a prize has at times been disputed. Those splendid gifts, the manliness, the magnanimity, the incapability of

envy, jealousy, meanness, unkindness, the freshness, the genius which extracted gold from everything, and transmuted lead into gold, the large presence in letters and in life, which ennobled both—were they the poet's or the story-teller's more legitimate attributes? Study the poems; and you will find the basis of all there.

Never in writer was there less of egotism; yet never poet was more assured that poetry was his vocation. He continued in the full practice of the art as long as inspiration, with the rarest exceptions, denied by many to be exceptions, is wont to descend. For its sake he had sacrificed professional ambition; he had curbed the aspirations of romance, and bidden it take second place. There it waited, a modest understudy, until poetry voluntarily withdrew, when it came forward to play the character pro tanto. But the poetic spirit dwelt apart; it had not died. It is felt, feeding, guiding, lending warmth and grace to fiction, always prepared to step forth from its retirement at need;—like Achilles, behind the borrowed shield of Ajax, scaring with his battle-cry the wolves of Troy from the body of Patroclus.

The Poetical Works of Sir Walter Scott, ed. J. G. Lockhart. 12 vols. Edinburgh: 1833–4.

[1] The Lord of the Isles, Canto vi, st 24.
[2] Marmion, Canto vi, stanzas 25–26.
[3] The Lady of the Lake, Canto v, st. 9.
[4] Macgregor's Gathering.
[5] The Lay of the Last Minstrel, Canto ii, st. 1
[6] Ibid., Canto vi, st. 23.
[7] Marmion, Canto vi, st. 31.
[8] Ibid; Introduction to Canto i
[9] Ibid.

JAMES HOGG

1770—1835

A POET, a born poet, and nothing but a poet; a poet all over, who thought in poetry; with whom all he saw turned to poetry; who wrote much verse, read formerly, and still, if at all, with pleasure; who had the aspirations of a great poet, perhaps, the belief that he was one; who yet was never recognized as more than a minor poet; and never, with a single exception, wrote other than minor poetry.

Not that his copious poetical repertory is without abundant testimony to a rich and ready fancy. He is at home in Fairyland. The Haunted Glen, in which the Elves are to meet to crown for King a mortal man refined into their nature by seven years of penance, is full of delicate imaginings. The monarch-elect re-names his attendant sprites, as in its model, A Midsummer Night's Dream, where a grosser creature discharges the same function. So dainty here is the texture that, in fear of coming upon coarser threads, we have a sense of relief when the fabric is left incomplete with a dismissal of the little beings to their several duties. Still more musical, as voiced in Ettrick dialect, is the appeal to the fairies to watch over a new-born babe. Humour everywhere in Hogg bubbles up freely, though nowhere more delightfully than in the tragi-comedy of The Gude Greye Katt. No feeling heart can help compassionating the sad plight of the great Byschope of Blain, who for toying with the beauteous witch he had

been invited to unmask and ban, finds himself suddenly in Mistress Pussy's claws taking aghast

his jante
Up throu the milkye waye.[1]

There is store as well of humour's sister, real pathos; from the elegy on the nameless child, whose

little feet across the lawn
Scarce from the primrose pressed the dew;
I thought the spirit of the dawn
Before me to the greenwood flew;[2]

to Poor Little Jessie's lament:

It 's lang sin' I lost baith my father and mother,
I'm simple an' poor, an' forlorn on the way:
I had ane that I likit, an only dear brother,
My Willie—but he 's lying cauld i' the clay.[3]

Even the 'old house', deserted by the thriving, aged farmer, has its tribute of pretty pity:

Thy roof will fa', thy rafters start,
How damp an' cauld thy hearth will be
Ah, sae will soon ilk honest heart,
That erst was blithe an' bauld in thee.
Fareweel my house an' burnie clear,
My bourtree bush an' bowzy tree,
The wee while I maun sojourn here
I'll never find a hame like thee.[4]

And he can sing too, Burns-like, just for singing's sake, as of Peggie,

the fairest flower
The braes o' Ettrick ever saw,[5]

and of the blissful hour,

When the little wee bit heart
Rises high in the breast,
An' the little wee bit starn
Rises red in the east.

O there 's a joy sae dear,
That the heart can hardly frame,
Wi' a bonnie, bonnie lassie,
When the kye comes hame,
When the kye comes hame,
'Tween the gloaming and the mirk,
When the kye comes hame.[6]

The possibilities of charm in all real poetry are infinite. Whenever we look close at verse by a genuine poet, of high or low degree, a temptation, as here, to exaggerate merit naturally arises. Standing a little farther off, I see defects pervading the entire body of Hogg's verse. Not merely do they affect windy effusions, like Mary Lee of Carelha, the tiresome imitations of contemporary writers in The Poetic Mirror, the echoes, not confessed imitations—as is Busaco, of Hohenlinden—the glib, false sentiment of Cary O' Kean, and the mediocrity of the Sacred Melodies; they are not absent even from the pieces I have selected to show the poet at his best. It is not only, or mainly, a rawness both of material and of workmanship, a dearth of mellowness and finish. The quality which I chiefly miss is poetic rapture, with the consequent glow of sympathy between reader and author. A poem with those properties will leave behind in the reader's soul something of itself, which draws him back to it with ropes, whether of silk or of steel. Here he admires, thinks how clever it all is, how beautiful some parts—and retains nothing. The flood has swept over the surface of the mind, and is gone.

I fear I can make no large exception, none in favour even of The Gude Greye Katt. My objection applies to the bulk of The Queen's Wake itself, on which, as a whole, the survival of the Shepherd's reputation principally depends. The preambles to its various tales generally are excellent;

for in them he forgets to be aught but himself, the bard, who

> on Ettrick's mountain green
> In nature's bosom nursed had been.[7]

Two or three beautiful songs are interspersed ; in particular, The Spectre's pathetic Cradle Song :

> Hush, my bonny babe !—hush, and be still !
> Thy mother's arms shall shield thee from ill ;
> Far have I borne thee in sorrow and pain,
> To drink the breeze of the world again.
> The dew shall moisten thy brow so meek,
> And the breeze of midnight fan thy cheek ;
> And soon shall we rest in the bow of the hill—
> Hush, my bonny babe !—hush, and be still ![8]

In the tales themselves, with one delightful exception, I do not rate the quality above Hogg's usual standard. All suffer from his common weakness of too easy contentment with his work ; of excessive and unpruned metrical facility. For instance, consider the preposterous length of the fourteenth bard's ballad, otherwise captivating, of Mary Scott ! Such productions are to the higher poetry something such as Mémoires pour servir are to history. They suggest a poet in the making rather than made.

Only once does Hogg appear to me to have undergone a fit, no mere transient spasm, of the rapture which communicates itself to a poet's public. In Kilmeny, if nowhere else, he is inspired. That is among the poems which, having been once actually taken into the mind, remain possessions, and in possession. It has growth in it, and atmosphere. If there is something also of glorious unreason in the choice of sweet Kilmeny for a semi-earthly, semi-ethereal immortality, the extravagance is without offence.

As we read of her beautiful childhood, her vanishing, her loving reappearance in that which was felt to be no longer her ain countrye, how she sojourned briefly among her kinsfolk, a waking dream, and finally dissolved again into a celestial memory, we are sensible of no violence; we are in the poet's hands, and are content to be there:

Bonnie Kilmeny gaed up the glen;
But it wasna to meet Duneira's men;
It was only to hear the yorlin sing,
And pu' the cress-flower round the spring;
For Kilmeny was pure as pure could be.
But lang may her minny look o'er the wa',
And lang may she seek i' the green-wood shaw;
Lang the laird o' Duneira blame,
And lang, lang greet or Kilmeny come hame!
When many lang day had come and fled,
When grief grew calm, and hope was dead,
When mess for Kilmeny's soul had been sung,
When the bedesman had prayd, and the dead bell rung;
Late, late in a gloamin' when all was still,
When the fringe was red on the westlin hill,
The wood was sere, the moon i' the wane,
The reek o' the cot hung over the plain,
Like a little wee cloud in the world its lane;
When the ingle lowed wi' an eiry leme,
Late, late in the gloamin' Kilmeny came hame!

'Kilmeny, Kilmeny, where have you been?
Lang hae we sought baith holt and dean.'
Kilmeny look'd up with a lovely grace,
But nae smile was seen on Kilmeny's face;
As still was her look, and as still was her ee,
As the stillness that lay on the emerant lea;
Or the mist that sleeps on a waveless sea.
For Kilmeny had been she ken'd not where,
And Kilmeny had seen what she could not declare;
Kilmeny had been where the cock never crew,
Where the rain never fell, and the wind never blew,

But it seem'd as the harp of the sky had rung,
And the airs of heaven play'd round her tongue,
When she spake of the lovely forms she had seen,
And a land where sin had never been,
A land of love and a land of light,
Withouten sun, or moon, or night;
Where the river swa'd a living stream,
And the light a pure and cloudless beam;
A land of vision it would seem,
A still, an everlasting dream.

In yon green-wood there is a waik,
And in that waik there is a wene,
In that green wene Kilmeny lay,
Her bosom happ'd wi' flowerets gay;
But the air was soft and the silence deep,
And bonny Kilmeny fell sound asleep.
She kenn'd nae mair, nor open'd her ee,
Till waked by the hymns of a far countrye.

She woke on a couch of the silk sae slim,
All striped in the bars of the rainbow's rim;
And lovely beings round were rife,
Who erst had travell'd mortal life.

They clasp'd her waist and her hands sae fair,
They kiss'd her cheek and they kemed her hair,
And round came many a blooming fere,
Saying, 'Bonnie Kilmeny, ye're welcome here!
Now shall the land of the spirits see,
Now shall it ken what a woman may be.
Many lang year, in sorrow and pain,
Many lang year through the world we've gane,
Commission'd to watch fair womankind,
For it 's they who nurice th' immortal mind.
O, sweet to Heaven the maiden's prayer,
And the sigh that heaves a bosom sae fair!
And dear to Heaven the words of truth,
And the praise of virtue frae beauty's mouth!

O bonny Kilmeny! free frae stain,
If ever you seek the world again,
That world of sin, of sorrow, and fear,
O tell of the joys that are waiting here.'

They lifted Kilmeny, they led her away,
And she walk'd in the light of a sunless day;
The sky was a dome of crystal bright,
The fountain of vision, and fountain of light;
The emerant fields were of dazzling glow,
And the flowers of everlasting blow.
Then deep in the stream her body they laid,
That her youth and beauty never might fade;
And she heard a song, she heard it sung,
She kend not where; but sae sweetly it rung,
It fell on the ear like a dream of the morn;
'O blest be the day Kilmeny was born!
Now shall the land of the spirits see,
Now shall it ken what a woman may be!'

They bore her away, she wist not how,
For she felt not arm nor rest below;
But so swift they wained her through the light,
'Twas like the motion of sound or sight;
Unnumbered groves below them grew,
They came, they pass'd, and backward flew,
Like floods of blossoms gliding on,
A moment seen, in a moment gone.
. . . . . .
But to sing the sights Kilmeny saw,
So far surpassing nature's law,
The singer's voice wad sink away,
And the string of his harp wad cease to play.
But she saw till the sorrows of man were by,
And all was love and harmony;
Till the stars of heaven fell calmly away,
Like the flakes of snaw on a winter day.

Then Kilmeny begged again to see
The friends she had left in her ain countrye;

To tell of the place where she had been,
And the glories that lay in the land unseen;
To warn the living maidens fair,
The loved of Heaven, the spirits' care,
That all whose minds unmeled remain
Shall bloom in beauty when time is gane.

With distant music, soft and deep,
They lull'd Kilmeny sound asleep;
And when she awaken'd, she lay her lane,
All happ'd with flowers, in the green-wood wene.
When seven lang years had come and fled,
When grief was calm, and hope was dead;
When scarce was remembered Kilmeny's name,
Late, late in a gloamin' Kilmeny came hame!

. . . . . .

When a month and a day had come and gane,
Kilmeny sought the green-wood wene;
There laid her down on the leaves sae green,
And Kilmeny on earth was never mair seen.
But O, the words that fell from her mouth
Were words of wonder and words of truth!
But all the land were in fear and dread,
For they kendna whether she was living or dead.
It wasna her hame, and she couldna remain;
She left this world of sorrow and pain,
And returned to the land of thought again![9]

Never was Fairyland made to appear nearer to us, or suffused with lovelier colours. Aware of such a potentiality within him, if seldom elsewhere developed to equal perfection, Hogg himself may be forgiven for some soreness of heart at the wounding wisdom of worldly experience, which led his patron Scott to recommend him to confine versifying to legends of Ettrick Glen, and the like, while keeping to sheep-farming for his life's vocation:

Blest be his generous heart for aye
He told me where the relic lay:

Pointed my way with ready will,
Afar on Ettrick's wildest hill;
Watch'd my first notes with curious eye,
And wonderd at my minstrelsy;
He little weend a parent's tongue
Such strains had o'er my cradle sung.
But when to native feelings true,
I struck upon a chord was new;
When by myself I 'gan to play,
He tried to wile my harp away.
O could the bard I loved so long,
Reprove my fond aspiring song?
Or could his tongue of candour say,
That I should throw my harp away?
Just when her notes began with skill,
To sound beneath the southern hill,
And twine around my bosom's core,
How could we part for evermore?
'Twas kindness all—I cannot blame—
For bootless is the minstrel flame:
But sure a bard might well have known
Another's feelings by his own![10]

It was natural for him to fancy that in happier circumstances, with more sympathy from without, he had it in him to rank with his many illustrious contemporaries. Yet I am afraid that, if Kilmeny, though certainly no accident, stands alone among his works, the default was rather in himself than in others; that, if his soul held the germs of new Kilmenys, the will was wanting to endure in patience the pangs of bringing them forth, equipped to soar and sing.

Poems and Life of the Ettrick Shepherd. New Edition. By the Rev. Thomas Thomson. London: Blackie, 1865. Also The Poetical Works of James Hogg. Four vols. Edinburgh: Arch. Constable, 1822.

[1] The Gude Greye Katt (The Poetic Mirror), st. 7.

[2] Elegy, st. 43 (Poems Descriptive and Sentimental).

[3] Poor Little Jessie (Miscellaneous Songs), st. 4.

[4] The Auld Man's Fareweel to his Wee House (Poems Descriptive and Sentimental), stanzas 9 and 11.

[5] Blithe an' Cheerie (Love Songs), st. 1.

[6] When the Kye comes Hame (Miscellaneous Songs), st. 6.

[7] Tenth Bard's Preamble (The Queen's Wake).

[8] Ibid., The Spectre's Cradle Song (The Queen's Wake), st. 1.

[9] Thirteenth Bard's Song—Kilmeny (The Queen's Wake).

[10] Ibid., The Queen's Wake—Conclusion.

WALTER SAVAGE LANDOR

1775—1864

A POET with greatness in him; who has written unforgettable things. Illustrious in prose as in verse; but always a poet. As a poet, a success and a failure.

To begin with a theme by which he would himself have chosen to be judged—in his metempsychosis as a Greek poet he works miracles. Study Enaleos and Cymodameia, Pan and Pitys, Cupid and Pan, Europa and her Mother, Chrysaor, The Altar of Modesty. The outlines are exquisitely clear, never out of drawing; the grace, if sometimes marble-cold, is finely statuesque. Now and again the warm, living, modern blood asserts itself in him; and the figures are suffused with pathos. Even then, if not Greek, neither are they crudely Gothic. The blend is beautifully tempered in The Hamadryad; in Peleus and Thetis; in the first part of Corythos; in the coquetting with her peasant wooer of the sweet wood-nymph, who, as any human maid, knew that

> to play at love,
> Stopping its breathings when it breathes most soft,
> Is sweeter than to play on any pipe;[1]

and in that masterpiece, Iphigeneia and Agamemnon, with the final heroic tenderness of the victim:

> An aged man now enter'd, and without
> One word, stept slowly on, and took the wrist
> Of the pale maiden. She lookt up, and saw
> The fillet of the priest and calm cold eyes.
> Then turn'd she where her parent stood, and cried
> 'O father! grieve no more; the ships can sail.'[2]

In another as admirable, The Espousals of Polyxena, the melancholy deepens into remorseless tragedy ; all is frankly Hellenic. It is not often that, with Landor, insular fancy runs insolently wild, as in Achilles and Helena on Ida. For the most part the self-restraint is as admirable as the vivacity. It distinguishes itself particularly in the brave repulse of temptations to measure ancient virtue by modern canons. Landor's sense of consistency is incorruptible by sentiment. He dismisses the ghost of Achilles with a legacy of vindictiveness against the House of Priam, without a word of pity for its child, his affianced, most innocent bride, whom none

Heeded, tho' sinking as if into death.[3]

The same fidelity to artistic duty pervades the Acts and Scenes from Roman and modern history.

Occasionally, it may be admitted, he somewhat abuses his liberty when he is given or assumes a free hand, as in the tyrannicidal scene between Tyrrel and Rufus, and in the thrilling description of Beatrice Cenci's execution :

Men have been brave, but women have been braver ![4]

In general he keeps his footing firmly over medieval and classical quagmires. He does not pretend to set history right when, as if with intention, it has wrapt in darkness characters like those of Count Julian and Queen Giovanna. Readers might sometimes wish that he had indulged a little at times in anachronistic sentimentality. We feel a shock, as in the presence of a cruel action, at the brutish exultation of King Henry, as he hears on Richmond Chase Anne Boleyn's ' knell from Paul's ' :

' How sweetly that bell warbled o'er the water ! ' [5]

It must have required all even of his courage to print the

scene between young Caesarion and the murderous hireling, Scopas. High dramatic skill in the analysis of emotions but just renders it endurable; and all the admiration students must feel for a consummate artist is needed to earn his pardon for the torture he inflicts upon them.

Genius owes it to itself, to the world, to show the utmost it can do, to set itself difficult tasks, to climb high peaks which lead nowhere, for the attainment of ends apparently profitless. Rightly it is accounted an unworthy thing to be content with easy, dazzling effects. Trusting to its untried capabilities, it often leaps without measuring width or depth. Sometimes it attempts the impracticable. I have no doubt but that Landor, who acted loyally up to the obligations his great powers laid upon him, reckoned the Hellenics, and Acts and Scenes, his foremost achievements in poetry. He judged aright, I believe, of the former, if not of the latter. Unhappily, the public of fair intelligence scarcely agreed with the author in his lifetime, and agrees yet less now. Its error, as I consider the neglect, has contributed to a second and costlier one. It has involved a multitude of pieces possessed of every title to popularity, except the fact.

Landor tells a story as few poets can. Witness the charming tale of the hapless love of Guidone and Lucia. Never was there a more righteous critic; yet with what charm in confessing and excusing faults in those whom, like Catullus, he loves:

> Yes, in Thalia's son
> Such stains there are—as when a Grace
> Sprinkles another's laughing face
> With nectar, and runs on![6]

Never was there one of his fiery nature more delicately discriminating, more signally without malignity or jealousy;

for it seemed to him an act of obligatory literary justice to condemn Young :

> Thou dreariest droll of puffy short-breath'd writers ![7]

But first and foremost of his gifts is that he can sing. In the collection of 1846 there is a wreath of songs which it would be hard to match. Add to them from later volumes ; and we shall still discover fresh and fresh irresistible candidates for admittance to the sisterhood.

Whenever I recommence turning over the pages, I come upon another, and yet another, that cannot be denied. They represent among them all kinds of qualities. A lover of poetry must be difficult to please who does not find an example anywhere to suit his taste, though the poet's own favourite lyrical mood, which personally he belied, is an appealing melancholy. Observe the feathery touch, the variety, the piquancy ; and guess—they are not too intricate—the sweet conundrums set in delicious music :

Here, ever since you went abroad,
  If there be change, no change I see,
I only walk our wonted road,
  The road is only walkt by me.

Yes ; I forgot ; a change there is ;
  Was it of that you bade me tell ?
I catch at times, at times I miss
  The sight, the tone, I know so well.

Only two months since you stood here !
  Two shortest months ! then tell me why
Voices are harsher than they were,
  And tears are longer ere they dry.[8]

Twenty years hence my eyes may grow
If not quite dim, yet rather so,
Still yours from others they shall know
  Twenty years hence.

Twenty years hence, tho' it may hap
That I be call'd to take a nap
In a cool cell where thunder-clap
Was never heard,

There, breathe but o'er my arch of grass
A not too sadly sigh'd 'Alas!'
And I shall catch, ere you can pass,
That wingèd word.[9]

Loved, when my love from all but thee had flown,
Come near me; seat thee on this level stone;
And, ere thou lookest o'er the churchyard wall,
To catch, as once we did, yon waterfall,
Look a brief moment on the turf between,
And see a tomb thou never yet hast seen.
My spirit will be sooth'd to hear once more
'Good-bye' as gently spoken as before.[10]

There are sweet flowers that only blow by night,
And sweet tears are there that avoid the light;
No mortal sees them after day is born,
They, like the dew, drop trembling from their thorn.[11]

Very true, the linnets sing
Sweetest in the leaves of spring;
You have found in all these leaves
That which changes and deceives,
And, to pine by sun or star,
Left them, false ones as they are.
But there be who walk beside
Autumn's till they all have died,
And who lend a patient ear
To low notes from branches sere.[12]

Ah what avails the sceptred race,
Ah what the form divine!
What every virtue, every grace!
Rose Aylmer, all were thine.

Rose Aylmer, whom these wakeful eyes
May weep, but never see,
A night of memories and of sighs
I consecrate to thee.[13]

The leaves are falling; so am I;
The few late flowers have moisture in the eye;
So have I too.
Scarcely on any bough is heard
Joyous, or even unjoyous, bird
The whole wood through.
Winter may come; he brings but nigher
His circle (yearly narrowing) to the fire
Where old friends meet;
Let him; now heaven is over-cast,
And spring and summer both are past,
And all things sweet.[14]

Mother, I cannot mind my wheel;
My fingers ache; my lips are dry;
Oh, if you felt the pain I feel!
But oh, who ever felt as I!
No longer could I doubt him true;
All other men may use deceit;
He always said my eyes were blue,
And often swore my lips were sweet.[15]

And, lastly:

Is it no dream that I am he
Whom one awake all night
Rose ere the earliest birds to see,
And met by dawn's red light;

Who, when the wintry lamps were spent,
And all was drear and dark,
Against the rugged pear-tree leant
While ice crackt off the bark;

Who little heeded sleet and blast,
But much the falling snow;
Those in few hours would sure be past,
His traces that might show;

Between whose knees, unseen, unheard,
The honest mastiff came,
Nor fear'd he; no, nor was he fear'd;
Tell me, am I the same?

O come! the same dull stars we'll see,
The same o'erclouded moon.
O come! and tell me am I he?
O tell me, tell me soon.[16]

One and all, magical! Yet these nine are only specimens of a host, including, perhaps, others for many minds lovelier still. Indeed, the labour of trying to account by examples for the homage I have rendered to the singer doubtless has been superfluous, when, I dare say, it could have been justified as adequately by a couple of lines:

I loved him not; and yet now he is gone,
I feel I am alone.

Strange, that a multitude of the like should not be household words! What irony of literary fate that the poet's name should be inscribed among the highly honoured in English literature, and his poems remain, unless for a small minority, virtually a sealed book!

He has met with a doom analogous to that designed by St. Romuald's votaries, according to Southey's ballad, for their holy townsman. He has been sanctified by a premature death. While he ought to be still living and read, he has been elevated into the dignified repose of a classic. Contrasted qualities in him are equally responsible. He suffers both from diffuseness and from compression. Gebir is a thicket of grand poetical properties. Sonorous gusts of fitful, shadowy ideas blow about it. They constantly elude any ordinary mental grasp. The trilogy, having for its centre miserable Queen Giovanna, is a labyrinth of a hundred and forty pages, in which history

and romance go astray, mimicking one another's voice. Sometimes, on the other hand, as in Coresus and Callirhoë, and in many of the lyrics, he is so precipitately brief that the climax is an affront. Then in the longer pieces, based on history, he is apt after an evil and favourite habit of the British Legislature, to proceed 'by reference'. That is, he assumes that the real events are known, or will be looked up. Not less offensive to popular taste is the want of sifting. Mere exercises, like the trial of Aeschylus, the bandying of indifferent compliments between him and Sophocles, the slaughter of Corythos by his father, and the rescue of Alcestis by Hercules, elbow scenes of absolute loveliness, such as The Hamadryad, Iphigeneia, the first part of Corythos, Peleus and Thetis, and Polyxena. A similar want of assortment doubtless has helped to spoil even the garden of lyrics for a public which will not be at the pains to distinguish between flowers and weeds.

The same public, docile when it is a question of economy of brain-worry, has been satisfied to take it on trust from the initiated that Landor is a poet who sits on the dais. It does not trouble to scrutinize his right. Were it to inquire, it would learn that he had the poet's gift of imparting to his verse, over and above all else, a feeling as if of a spirit having hovered near. The attribute is to be prized beyond all others, when apprehended; for it is the readers' then as much as the writer's; and every writer rejoices to share the delight with them. Landor, it is to be feared, had little of that pleasure. But the popular coldness, which was his ordinary experience, cannot have deprived him of the rapture of feeling the descent of inspiration. I read a sense at least of this supreme joy in his own review of a career which impressed his contemporaries as harassed—however needlessly—cross-grained,

ineffectual, and unhappy. With spiritual visitations such as favoured him, he cannot have wholly mocked himself in the farewell, which, while it charms, brings somehow an ache to admiring hearts :

> I strove with none ; for none was worth my strife.
> Nature I loved, and, next to Nature, Art ;
> I warm'd both hands before the fire of life ;
> It sinks, and I am ready to depart.[17]

The Works and Life of Walter Savage Landor. Eight vols. Chapman and Hall, 1876. Vol. vii, Gebir ; Acts and Scenes ; Hellenics. Vol. viii, Miscellaneous Poems.

[1] The Hamadryad (Hellenics).
[2] Iphigeneia and Agamemnon (Hellenics).
[3] The Espousals of Polyxena (Hellenics).
[4] Beatrice Cenci (Dialogues in Verse).
[5] Henry the Eighth and Anne Boleyn (Dialogues in Verse).
[6] On Catullus (The Last Fruit off an Old Tree, Epigrams, vi).
[7] Young (Last Fruit, &c., Ibid., 63).
[8] Miscellaneous Poems, Collection of 1846, No. 63.
[9] Ibid., No. 58. [10] Ibid., No. 200.
[11] Additional Poems, No. 96.
[12] Miscellaneous Poems, Collection of 1846, No. 152.
[13] Ibid., No. 102. [14] Ibid., No. 213.
[15] Ibid., No. 93. [16] Ibid., No. 61.
[17] Prefixed to volume : The Last Fruit off an Old Tree. E. Moxon, 1853.

THOMAS MOORE

1779—1852

COURAGE is required to praise Moore even moderately. Admiration of him is likely to be taken as evidence of a preference of sound to sense, and of a propensity to the heinous crime of cheap sensibility. Notwithstanding liability to these terrible charges, I will not without a struggle be parted from old favourites in his life's work. Now as formerly I find in it a power of affording to particular moods the satisfaction they have been craving. Not merely are there special poems which I could not consent to abandon; there even is a spirit in the whole which asserts for it a right to lodge within the recognized poetic domain.

Much of Moore's published work, I willingly allow, has long been out of date. The smoothness of his Anacreon is not Hellenic enough to content modern scholarship. The vivacity of his political and social satire evaporated as it hit its mark. The Twopenny Post-bag, The Intercepted Letters, and The Fudge Family in Paris, with a legion of political epigrams, are forgotten; and it is useless to complain. Their humour and wit, sometimes riotous, oftener caustic, always gay and audacious, require too much reading-in, between the lines, of scandals connected with Carlton House—no longer a Whig centre—and its unwieldy master. For very different reasons Lalla Rookh is similarly neglected. There also I equally recognize the uselessness of quarrelling with public taste. The diffuseness, especially in The Fire Worshippers, and a want

of reasonableness, towards which Fadladeen really was over-tolerant, in the entire scheme of the tale of The Veiled Prophet, might have been excused. The treatment of the general theme as if it were a huge operatic libretto, a medley of musical spectacles, was fatal. Moore had learnt so perfectly the art of writing words to an air that he composed a poem of the dimensions of an epic on the same lines. The crowd of imagery in a work on that scale is bewildering. The covering plot is smothered in roses; it is drowned in a butt of sweet malmsey. The whole produces the effect not so much of poetry pure and simple as of poetry in solution.

All that remains positively extant out of a prolonged and industrious career's achievement is an accumulation of lyrics. Naturally they differ widely in degrees of merit. A few deserve to survive by virtue of their saucy insolence; for example—juvenile exercise though it was:

> When I lov'd you, I can't but allow
> I had many an exquisite minute;
> But the scorn that I feel for you now
> Hath even more luxury in it.
>
> Thus, whether we're on or we're off,
> Some witchery seems to await you;
> To love you was pleasant enough,
> And oh! 'tis delicious to hate you![1]

The clashing melody will rescue one at least of the Sacred Songs:

> Sound the loud timbrel o'er Egypt's dark sea!
> Jehovah has triumph'd—his people are free.
> Sing—for the pride of the tyrant is broken,
> His chariots, his horsemen, all splendid and brave—
> How vain was their boast, for the Lord hath but spoken,
> And chariots and horsemen are sunk in the wave.
> Sound the loud timbrel o'er Egypt's dark sea;
> Jehovah has triumphed—his people are free.[2]

A Canadian boat-song is music :

Faintly as tolls the evening chime
Our voices keep tune and our oars keep time.
Soon as the woods on shore look dim,
We'll sing at St. Anne's our parting hymn.
Row, brothers, row, the stream runs fast,
The Rapids are near, and the daylight 's past.

Why should we yet our sail unfurl ?
There is not a breath the blue wave to curl.
But, when the wind blows off the shore,
Oh ! sweetly we'll rest our weary oar.
Blow, breezes, blow, the stream runs fast,
The Rapids are near, and the daylight 's past ; [3]

and that, with something more, is :

Oft in the stilly night,
  Ere Slumber's chain has bound me,
Fond Memory brings the light
  Of other days around me.[4]

But the Irish Melodies are the real sheet-anchor of Moore's fame. Modern critics have often assured them they are dead. Some have accepted the judgement against themselves of an exaggerated sentimentality, and rest in their graves. Others, a fair number, are obstinately incredulous, and insist upon going on breathing. I should be sorry for myself if I ceased to find romance in :

The harp that once through Tara's halls
  The soul of beauty shed,
Now hangs as mute on Tara's walls,
  As if that soul were fled.—
So sleeps the pride of former days,
  So glory's thrill is o'er,
And hearts that once beat high for praise,
  Now feel that pulse no more.

No more to chiefs and ladies bright
The harp of Tara swells;
The chord alone, that breaks at night,
Its tale of ruin tells.
Thus Freedom now so seldom wakes,
The only throb she gives,
Is when some heart indignant breaks,
To show that still she lives; [5]

or tragic pathos in:

Oh! breathe not his name, let it sleep in the shade,
Where cold and unhonour'd his relics are laid:
Sad, silent, and dark, be the tears that we shed,
As the night-dew that falls on the grass o'er his head.

But the night-dew that falls, though in silence it weeps,
Shall brighten with verdure the grave where he sleeps;
And the tear that we shed, though in secret it rolls,
Shall long keep his memory green in our souls; [6]

All exhale a gallant assurance that time has no power, unless we abet it, to grind our souls to dust between its remorseless mill-stones; that, if we choose, we can go on sunning ourselves in the smiles of the young and fair; that there is no such thing as decrepit, care-worn age:

It is not while beauty and youth are thine own,
And thy cheeks unprofan'd by a tear,
That the fervour and faith of a soul can be known,
To which time will but make thee more dear;
No, the heart that has truly lov'd never forgets,
But as truly loves on to the close,
As the sun-flower turns on her god when he sets,
The same look which she turn'd when he rose; [7]

that joy is immortal for the faithful and brave:

Let Fate do her worst, there are relics of joy,
Bright dreams of the past, which she cannot destroy;

Which come in the night-time of sorrow and care,
And bring back the features that joy used to wear.
Long, long be my heart with such memories fill'd!
Like the vase in which roses have once been distill'd—
You may break, you may shatter the vase, if you will,
But the scent of the roses will hang round it still;[8]

that it was the Irishman's duty to pray for the prosperity of his country, and exult should it come, but that his love was hers now on account of her adversity:

Remember thee? Yes, while there 's life in this heart,
It shall never forget thee, all lorn as thou art;
More dear in thy sorrow, thy gloom, and thy showers,
Than the rest of the world in their sunniest hours.

Wert thou all that I wish thee, great, glorious, and free,
First flower of the earth, and first gem of the sea,
I might hail thee with prouder, with happier brow,
But oh! could I love thee more deeply than now?[9]

If I do not quote from the Last Rose of Summer, it is not because it is hackneyed. It is that I suppose there is no English song which dwells more habitually on the lips of memory.

There should be no difficulty at any rate in admitting the title of such verse to entrance within the lyrical hierarchy. In the century preceding his birth, isolated English songs here and there may be found to be set against his. Though Scotland twenty years earlier had produced Burns, the rest of the United Kingdom can show no body of lyrics to match them since Herrick's. He had a right to do more than boast that, as his own island's minstrel, he was the first of his line:

Dear Harp of my Country! in darkness I found thee,
The cold chain of silence had hung o'er thee long,
When, proudly, my own Island Harp, I unbound thee,
And gave all thy chords to light, freedom, and song![10]

South of the Tweed he could claim the same precedence. His, as singing poetry—drawing-room singing, perhaps—occupies a place by itself. Opinions may differ on the exact rank of the whole department in literature. At all events, he would be a bold critic who should attempt to warn the class off the slopes of Parnassus. In no case could he make out good warrant for beginning the ostracism with Moore.

From another point of view he can assert an exceptional claim to regard. The meeting of poetry and music in his verse, natural as it may seem, is phenomenal. The two are sister arts which by no means necessarily agree. Often, especially of late, they have been in deadly antagonism. It is impossible not to rejoice when their union is spontaneous, as in the Muse of Moore. He has himself declared that he considered his songs ' a sort of compound creations, in which the music formed no less essential a part than the verses '. He lamented that he had to print editions in which they were separated from the airs.[11] Lyrics without a musical setting appeared to him to be a contradiction in terms. As we read his, we may almost hear him warbling them as they flow. Music perpetually has been, and is being, made a cover for execrable verse. No one with justice can say this of the Melodies. They always are sweet, if occasionally to excess, and with a feeling genuine so far as it goes. Had indeed his raptures been wholly artificial, or his indignation ever false, an intelligence keen as his, and a spirit as upright, would have banned them long before his censors detected the shortcomings. A generous and kindly heart constantly is playing, and, as evidently, a sagacious brain is conducting the orchestra.

In the face of divers fine poetic qualities engaged in unison, it is disappointing for me as a juror—not a judge—

while I grant the claims of an entire class of the verse, to have to return an adverse general verdict in the Court of poetic art against its author. Gladly I qualify it by extenuating circumstances—I admire the man; I love many of the poems; I condemn the poet. The decision is painful, but unavoidable. A poet must be pronounced a failure when he has no power of sowing in his readers the germs of future thoughts or impulses. How long did ever emotion last which was stirred by the pitifulness of Paradise and the Peri, or the sadness of The Minstrel Boy? The fault is radical, I fear. Results are proportionate to their causes; and song, to live and be fruitful, must have been born in travail. Nature was unkindly kind to Moore, as to Herrick, in endowing him with an ear too instinctively true, too miscellaneous a sympathy, and a wit too docile and dexterous. His gifts seduced him into disregarding his own axiom—which agrees with Herrick's too—that 'labour to the writer' is a condition of 'any great pleasure to the reader'.[12] Otherwise, it is inconceivable that most of the produce of an imagination fertile like his, after having been worshipped by contemporaries, should be lost and forgotten, except for its casual and half contemptuous preservation in antiquated piano scores.

The Poetical Works of Thomas Moore. Collected by Himself. Ten vols. Longmans, 1853.

[1] T —— (Juvenile Poems).

[2] Miriam's Song, st. 1 (Sacred Songs), vol. iv.

[3] A Canadian Boat Song. Written on the River St. Lawrence (Poems relating to America), stanzas 1, 2.

[4] Scotch Air (National Airs).

[5] The Harp (Irish Melodies).

[6] Oh! Breathe Not —— (ibid.), st. 2.

[7] Believe me —— (ibid.).

[8] Farewell! (ibid.), st. 3.

[9] Remember Thee? (ibid.), stanzas 1, 2.

[10] Dear Harp —— (ibid.), st. 1.

[11] Preface—Poetical Works.

[12] A Melologue upon National Music—Advertisement, vol. v, p. 119.

JAMES HENRY LEIGH HUNT

1784—1859

A STATESMAN, in dedicating a memorial to Leigh Hunt, confessed to little knowledge of his writings. The same admission, as to all but one short poem, might be made by a majority of educated Englishmen. I should like to be able to treat the neglect as reflecting honour on the national genius for having produced authors of such merit, and in such plenty, as to have rendered him superfluous. At all events, any who take up a volume by Leigh Hunt for the first time will be surprised at its rare distinction of style. But they ought to be hurt, if not by regret for a pleasure they have hitherto denied themselves, by some sense of ingratitude to the kindly spirit which devoted itself during long years to the endeavour to entertain a careless public.

Grace is a special quality. It is not the highest. Beings of a lofty nature may be destitute of it. An addition of an excellence will sometimes mar it, or obscure the impression of its presence. Though very far from being a definition of genuine poetry, the Nothing-too-much commonly is part of one. Without claiming for Leigh Hunt that he never offends against the canon, I believe his instinct for it to be generally true. Whatever else his poetry is not, almost invariably it is in perfect taste. I never begin The Story of Rimini without a prejudice against its existence. When Dante had done it all in six dozen inimitable lines, it is sacrilege to pretend to

interpret and develop. Leigh Hunt's own exquisite rendering of the original [1] is itself a sufficient rebuke of his attempt at explaining. Yet I always end by acknowledging to myself that, if it were to be done, the decline or rise from innocent boy-and-girl friendship to passionate love could not have been more delicately shadowed.

The same praise can be bestowed, and without fear here of Dante's awful frown, on the rejuvenescence conferred upon the tragedy of Hero and Leander, an old tale,

> and yet as young
> And warm with life as ever minstrel sung;

a chronicle as

> of two that died last night,
> So might they now have liv'd, and so have died;
> The story's heart, to me, still beats against its side.[2]

Grace, again, carries away any suggestion of coarseness in The Gentle Armour, if it cannot, any more than in a better known later poem on the same subject, veil the mediaeval brutalism of the Godiva myth itself. Elsewhere, when an idea of Leigh Hunt's is in itself noble, it resists the temptation to overgrow itself. Roses and lilies, violets, sweetbrier, and poppies in his nineteenth-century garden might have been gathered by Ariel in his roamings from Prospero's Atlantis.[3]

The kindly instinct does not desert his pen even when the satirist and victim of the elderly royal Adonis turns volunteer Laureate, and sings the prettiest of lullabies over the cradle of a Queen's babe:

> Welcome, bud beside the rose,
> On whose stem our safety grows;
> Welcome, little Saxon Guelph;
> Welcome, for thine own small self;

Nought of all the news we sing
Dost thou know, sweet ignorant thing;
Nought of planet's love, nor people's;
Nor dost hear the giddy steeples
Carolling of thee and thine,
As if heav'n had rain'd them wine.
E'en thy father's loving hand
Nowise dost thou understand,
When he makes thee feebly grasp
His fingers with a tiny clasp;
Nor dost know thy very mother's
Balmy bosom from another's,
Nor the eyes that, while they fold thee,
Never can enough behold thee.
Mother true and good has she,
Little strong one, been to thee.
She has done her strenuous duty
To thy brain and to thy beauty,
Till thou cam'st a blossom bright,
Worth the kiss of air and light.[4]

He has deeper strains at his command. Lines simple enough, the doom of universal humanity, he has combined into a grisly portrait of the King of Terrors. No common minor poet's brain could have conceived and drawn it. A grand touch in Mahmoud is the Sultan's acceptance of grief as a subject's indefeasible title to an instant audience:

'Sorrow,' said Mahmoud, 'is a reverend thing;
I recognize its right, as King with King.' [5]

Brilliant rays pierce through the somewhat bewildering haze of the controversy between Captain Sword and Captain Pen:

O God! let me breathe, and look up at the sky!
Good is as hundreds, evil as one;
Round about goeth the golden sun.[6]

As for Abou Ben Adhem, it has always been admitted to be a pearl of great price:

Abou Ben Adhem—may his tribe increase—
Awoke one night from a deep dream of peace,
And saw within the moonlight in his room,
Making it rich, and like a lily in bloom,
An angel writing in a book of gold :—
Exceeding peace had made Ben Adhem bold,
And to the presence in the room he said,
'What writest thou ?'—The vision raised its head,
And with a look made of all sweet accord,
Answer'd, 'The names of those who love the Lord.'
'And is mine one ?' said Abou, 'Nay, not so,'
Replied the angel. Abou spoke more low,
But cheerly still ; and said, 'I pray thee then,
Write me as one that loves his fellow-men.'
The angel wrote, and vanish'd. The next night
It came again with a great wakening light,
And show'd the names whom love of God had bless'd,
And lo ! Ben Adhem's name led all the rest.[7]

An Angel in the House comes not far behind :

How sweet it were, if without feeble fright,
Or dying of the dreadful beauteous sight,
An angel came to us, and we could bear
To see him issue from the silent air
At evening in our room, and bend on ours
His divine eyes, and bring us from his bowers
News of dear friends, and children who have never
Been dead indeed—as we shall know for ever.
Alas ! we think not what we daily see
About our hearths,—angels that are to be,
Or may be, if they will, and we prepare
Their souls and ours to meet in happy air,—
A child, a friend, a wife whose soft heart sings
In unison with ours, breeding its future wings.[8]

The Grasshopper and the Cricket are hymned in lines which might be a version of a Greek epigram if they were not an original English sonnet :

Green little vaulter in the sunny grass,
Catching your heart up at the feel of June,
Sole voice that 's heard amidst the lazy noon,
When even the bees lag at the summoning brass;
And you, warm little housekeeper, who class
With those who think the candles come too soon,
Loving the fire, and with your tricksome tune
Nick the glad silent moments as they pass.

Oh sweet and tiny cousins, that belong,
One to the fields, the other to the hearth,
Both have your sunshine; both, though small, are strong
At your clear hearts; and both seem given to earth
To ring in thoughtful ears this natural song—
Indoors and out, summer and winter, Mirth.[9]

When Leigh Hunt pleases he is as saucy as Villon, without it ever pleasing him to raise a blush. But whatever the other attractions of his Muse, grace remains the peculiar and distinguishing property.

In his career, and for his posthumous fame, it was and is a double-edged endowment. I suppose that it was connected in him as a poet with an exceptional capacity for absorbing his entire personal being into certain qualities of his subject. His nature was able to identify itself with whatever was artistically dainty and emotionally beautiful. Hence his elegance as a writer, and probably also his weakness both as writer and as man. No writer was ever less self-centred. He was fashioned to flutter about flowers of fancy and art; sucking, rarely in the depths, their honey; successful in discovering, not in storing it. It is not strange that in his early days hard measure should have been dealt out to such a nature. At his dawn partisanship flayed him with the bitter tongue of Christopher North, as well as providing him, more materially, with a lodging in Horsemonger Lane

jail. Even at his sunset his own familiar friend, unintentionally, we may be sure, was the cause of the fastening upon him of an odious character in fiction. A delightful writer both in prose and verse, he never was visited by a gleam of prosperity. The public cared little for one who had no message of his own to deliver, not even an agreeable rancour to wreak. Had he, like the proverbial worm, been given to turning, he might at least have excited interest, if not compassion. As it was, he simply went on with his singing, not admiringly remarked in life, and scarcely at all since.

He was and is, I dare say, one of the poets the world can do without, though I think it a pity it should. In any case it may be hoped and believed that to him, singing as a bird sings, because it must, so pleasure came from his song, as it comes to a bird, because to the singer of a sweet song pleasure must.

The Poetical Works of Leigh Hunt. E. Moxon, 1844. (Stories in Verse: by Leigh Hunt. G. Routledge & Co., 1855.)

[1] Paulo and Francesca (Stories in Verse).
[2] Hero and Leander, Canto i (The Poetical Works), pp. 1–35.
[3] Chorus of the Flowers (ibid.).
[4] To the Infant Princess Royal (ibid.).
[5] Mahmoud (ibid.).
[6] Captain Sword and Captain Pen (ibid.).
[7] Abou Ben Adhem and the Angel (ibid.).
[8] An Angel in the House (ibid.).
[9] To the Grasshopper and the Cricket (ibid.).

GEORGE GORDON, LORD BYRON

1788—1824

WHAT of this torrent of verse, myrrh and gall, poured forth in some fifteen years—is it a living stream, or unfiltered surface-water? Is it the cursing epitaph on Timon's tomb by the wild sea-waves, or the shower of gold accompanying imprecations on his age and fellow men, as the misanthrope stands, a prophet of evil, at the mouth of his forlorn cave?

If a voice from the grave, it is at any rate a mighty voice, as of a Titan buried alive under Etna. Such modern criticism as is prone to deny present active existence to Byron, will not dispute that he lived once, and issued royal proclamations. He stood for force, movement, perturbation. Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley, and Keats were more radical revolutionists in poetry. Byron never ceased to profess himself a disciple of Dryden and Pope. But the most fervent admirers of the first four would not pretend to compare the contemporary innovating influence of the whole of them in literature with Byron's. He did as much towards extending the sway of England as the victories of Nelson and Wellington, or the despotic will of Pitt. The personality, in its weaknesses as in its strength, fascinated. His pilgrimage of passion and remorse marked its course as with red-hot lava on the heart of Europe.

Now, when the rush of molten matter has cooled and stiffened, it is easy to analyse its aberrations and impurities. Its extravagances are monstrous. Whatever the crimes of

Castlereagh against freedom, the cause of liberty is polluted by sneers at the 'tinkering slave-maker', by insults to his corpse:

> He has cut his throat at last! He! Who?
> The man who cut his country's long ago.

So with the scream at the Poet-Laureate, as

> shuffling Southey, that incarnate lie;

and at Wordsworth's principal work, as:

> A drowsy frowzy poem, call'd the 'Excursion',
> Writ in a manner which is my aversion.

The egotism passes all bounds. The quality is a foible dear to the poetic temperament—to the highest, and the lowest—to any but Shakespeare's as a dramatist—and he takes his revenge in the Sonnets. The temptation to indulgence in it is so eager, that, according to a subtle poet-critic in the early nineteenth century, sensitive bards, conscious, and ashamed, of its power over them, have chosen themes alien to their taste to be able, under cover of them, to stray, as if by accident, into scenes enshrining themselves. That was not Byron's way. He makes no disguise of his intention never to be off the stage. The result is that his favourite moods, cynicism in Don Juan, satiety in Childe Harold, have an air of cheapness. Sceptical readers experience a general impression of insincerity. They suspect a want of spontaneity everywhere, in the pathos, as in the disgust. The texture they see often is threadbare, as it could not but be, with a heart dried up by sensual licence, and obliged to trust frequently to the brain to do the creative work of both.

He rebelled against law and order because he had not set them in motion; not, as his companion Shelley, from

a generous rage against a narrow-minded despotism. Nobody now believes in the genuineness of his indignation against tyranny. A Lord, with the self-indulgence of the Prince Regent, preaching Socialism is a ridiculous figure to the present generation. The admiration he gained for his errors has itself ruined his posthumous renown. He is punished by the taunts of the new age for having hypnotized its predecessor into adoring his follies. With all the mimicry, all the flattery, all the absurdity, it is the more wonderful that a real poet, a seer of visions, should remain recognizable beneath. We may pass by much that he wrote. A majority of the occasional pieces would probably have been smothered by himself had he foreseen the celebrity of Childe Harold and Don Juan. Satire, though vigorous and scathing as in English Bards and Scotch Reviewers, The Vision of Judgement, and The Curse of Minerva, naturally is short-lived. The Plays are too poetical for dramas, too dramatic for poems. As the eye glances over the titles of many of the published works, scarcely even an emotion of curiosity stirs.

Others there are on which we pause for a moment, and with delight, whenever accident recalls them. We cannot help recognizing power, for instance, in The Destruction of Sennacherib :

> Like the leaves of the forest when Summer is green,
> That host with their banners at sunset were seen ;
> Like the leaves of the forest when Autumn hath blown,
> That host on the morrow lay wither'd and strown ; [1]

and in the contrast, in the Ode to Napoleon, between his submissive abdication and Sulla's :

> The Roman, when his burning heart
> Was slaked with blood of Rome,
> Threw down the dagger—dared depart,
> In savage grandeur, home—

He dared depart in utter scorn
Of men that such a yoke had borne,
Yet left him such a doom!
His only glory was that hour
Of self-upheld abandon'd power.[2]

A mist of blood and tears mitigates the hectic hues of The Dream.[3] There is music for us still in :

She walks in beauty, like the night
Of cloudless climes and starry skies;
And all that 's best of dark and bright
Meet in her aspect and her eyes;[4]

and :

Oh could I feel as I have felt,—or be what I have been,
Or weep as I could once have wept o'er many a vanish'd scene;
As springs in deserts found seem sweet, all brackish though they be,
So, midst the wither'd waste of life, those tears would flow to me.[5]

We admire : we do not spontaneously reopen the volume.

It is the same with compositions of ancient renown, like The Giaour, The Bride of Abydos, The Corsair, Lara, The Prisoner of Chillon, Parisina, The Siege of Corinth. Echoes rise, and insist on rising, from them. The glowing west continually reminds how,

Slow sinks more lovely ere his race be run,
Along Morea's hills, the setting sun;
Not, as in Northern climes, obscurely bright,
But one unclouded blaze of living light!
On old Aegina's rock and Idra's isle,
The god of gladness sheds his parting smile;
O'er his own regions lingering, loves to shine,
Though there his altars are no more divine.
Descending fast the mountain shadows kiss
Thy glorious gulf, unconquer'd Salamis!
Their azure arches through the long expanse
More deeply purpled meet his mellowing glance,

And tenderest tints, along their summits driven,
Mark his gay course, and own the hues of heaven;
Till, darkly shaded from the land and deep,
Behind his Delphian cliff he sinks to sleep.[6]

A new age has forgotten, not merely the Giaour, but the Philhellenic fire its author played a foremost part in kindling; it cannot have forgotten:

He who hath bent him o'er the dead
Ere the first day of death is fled,
The first dark day of nothingness,
The last of danger and distress—
Before Decay's effacing fingers
Have swept the lines where beauty lingers—
And mark'd the mild angelic air,
The rapture of repose that 's there,
The fix'd yet tender traits that streak
The languor of the placid cheek,
And—but for that sad shrouded eye,
That fires not, wins not, weeps not, now,
And but for that chill, changeless brow,
Where cold Obstruction's apathy
Appals the gazing mourner's heart,
As if to him it could impart
The doom he dreads yet dwells upon;
Yes, but for these and these alone,
Some moments, ay, one treacherous hour,
He still might doubt the tyrant's power;
So fair, so calm, so softly seal'd,
The first, last look by death reveal'd!
Such is the aspect of this shore;
'Tis Greece, but living Greece no more!
So coldly sweet, so deadly fair,
We start, for soul is wanting there.[7]

Though few read the once fascinating Tale it introduces, fewer forget the prelude to one of its cantos:

The winds are high on Helle's wave,
As on that night of stormy water,

When Love, who sent, forgot to save
The young, the beautiful, the brave,
The lonely hope of Sestos' daughter.
Oh! when alone along the sky
Her turret torch was blazing high,
Though rising gale and breaking foam,
And shrieking sea-birds warn'd him home;
And clouds aloft and tides below,
With signs and sounds, forbade to go,
He could not see, he would not hear,
Or sound or sign foreboding fear;
His eye but saw that light of love,
The only star it hail'd above;
His ear but rang with Hero's song,
'Ye waves, divide not lovers long!' [8]

How beautiful the lines, and how sad to know, as well as impossible to deny, that the courts of the fairy palaces of fancy whence the romantic strains issued are now grassgrown, like the streets of lordly Ferrara! *Sic transit gloria*—but not always;—whatever the elevation or caprices of taste, I will never believe that the world can neglect Childe Harold, or passages in Don Juan which are not mere screams of despairing mockery.

Nearly a century has run out since Europe, astonished and spell-bound, tracked as strange a pilgrim as even Peter the Hermit ever enlisted in his devious wanderings over Europe. It hung upon the wanderer's every note, whether he sang a bull fight, or of murderous war—when

Death rides upon the sulphury Siroc,
Red Battle stamps his foot, and nations feel the shock— [9]

to its climax in the death struggle at Waterloo, with the final fall there of an Empire all but universal, and its Earth-God. It thrilled to his appeal to Greeks, and for Greece; above all, to his revelation of the magic of Italy; and a wider world thrills as before.

Not a traveller crosses the Rialto without the melody at his heart :

> In Venice Tasso's echoes are no more,
> And silent rows the songless gondolier ;
> Her palaces are crumbling to the shore,
> And music meets not always now the ear ;
> Those days are gone—but Beauty still is here.
> States fall, arts fade—but Nature doth not die,
> Nor yet forget how Venice once was dear,
> The pleasant place of all festivity,
> The revel of the earth, the masque of Italy ! [10]

No stranger paces the Tuscan Westminster Abbey without repeating the reproach for the absence of the ashes, as if the two spirits were hovering by to hear :

> Ungrateful Florence ! Dante sleeps afar,
> Like Scipio, buried by the upbraiding shore ;
> Thy factions, in their worse than civil war,
> Proscribed the bard whose name for evermore
> Their children's children would in vain adore
> With the remorse of ages ; and the crown
> Which Petrarch's laureate brow supremely wore,
> Upon a far and foreign soil had grown,
> His life, his fame, his grave, though rifled—not thine own.
> And Santa Croce wants their mighty dust ;
> Yet for this want more noted, as of yore
> The Caesar's pageant shorn of Brutus' bust,
> Did but of Rome's best Son remind her more.[11]

Beside yellow Tiber, flowing through a marble wilderness, lone mother of dead empires, the Niobe of nations, though no longer, as for Byron,

> Childless and crownless in her voiceless woe,[12]

his voice remains audible and eloquent. The

> sanctuary and home
> Of art and piety—Pantheon—pride of Rome,[13]

is his monument as much as Raffaelle's and Victor Emmanuel's. I have never visited the Forum, transformed

as it now is from its aspect to him, without viewing it first through his eyes, with its then single manifest break in the all-concealing level :

> Tully was not so eloquent as thou,
> Thou nameless column with the buried base ! [14]

In simple fealty still to Childe Harold, on my first juvenile visit, I, like many another tourist, began by hunting out, not without difficulty, the apocryphal, and now discarded statue of Pompey :

> And thou, dread statue ! yet existent in
> The austerest form of naked majesty,
> Thou who beheldest, 'mid the assassins' din,
> At thy bathed base the bloody Caesar lie,
> Folding his robe in dying dignity,
> An offering to thine altar from the queen
> Of gods and men, great Nemesis ! did he die,
> And thou, too, perish, Pompey ? have ye been
> Victors of countless kings, or puppets of a scene ? [15]

Archaeology may ridicule enthusiasm over the wrong relics. It will never lay bare on the Appian Way aught to interest as, at its entrance :

> a stern round tower of other days,
> Fair as a fortress, with its fence of stone,
> Such as an army's baffled strength delays,
> Standing with half its battlements alone,
> And with two thousand years of ivy grown
> The garland of eternity, where wave
> The green leaves over all by time o'erthrown ;—
> What was this tower of strength ? Within its cave
> What treasure lay so lock'd, so hid ?—A woman's grave.[16]

It is entrancement—romance, history, miracles of art and nature, letters, hate and love—the whole an ever-changing, ever-lovely diorama, contrived as a framework

for man's, one man's, emotions and ambitions! In this glorified guide-book, whether it lead us amidst tempests, in which

> every mountain now hath found a tongue,
> And Jura answers, through her misty shroud,
> Back to the joyous Alps, who call to her aloud![17]

along streams dyed, by day and night contending,

> The odorous purple of a new-born rose;[18]

through wrecks of realms strewing dread and lonely ocean's shores; past peaks of Alps throning eternity; by arrowy, storied rivers, beside battlefields infamous for martial 'cut-throats', or famed for stainless victories, like Morat and Morgarten; by homes of

> The self-torturing sophist, wild Rousseau;[19]

of Voltaire:

> Historian, bard, philosopher, combined,
> Who multiplied himself among mankind;
> The Proteus of their talents;[20]

of Gibbon:

> Sapping a solemn creed with solemn sneer,
> The lord of irony;[21]

and of

> The starry Galileo, with his woes;[22]

or tombs, as of Laura's lover in rustic Arqua—

> Where'er we tread 'tis haunted, holy ground!

Again, Don Juan! Faded, tawdry; often, as De Quincey justly calls allusions to Southey's and Coleridge's marriages, ignoble? Alas! yes. And the cruel waste! Righteous anger, grief, generosity, magnanimity, thought, shot out upon a dustheap! Whatever in Childe Harold was paltry, absurd, unbecoming, contemptible in contemptuousness, is here expanded and exaggerated. The whole is flavoured to nausea with the topsy-turvy theory of morals—the redeemability of malpractices by remorse, or by the insult

of pity, while the fruit of iniquity and cruelty is actually between the teeth. Cynicism is made welcome to float away on a flood of self-satisfied tears. Guilt seems to expect to be fondled like a lost sheep, however many times it may have chosen to repeat its wanderings in the wilderness.

I scarcely know whether it be an extenuation, or an aggravation, that Don Juan has another side. Suddenly it breaks into episodes of rare grandeur. The description of the shipwreck has seldom, if ever, been equalled :

> Then rose from sea to sky the wild farewell—
> Then shriek'd the timid, and stood still the brave—
> Then some leap'd overboard with dreadful yell,
> As eager to anticipate their grave ;
> And the sea yawn'd around her like a hell,
> And down she suck'd with her the whirling wave,
> Like one who grapples with his enemy,
> And strives to strangle him before he die.
>
> And first one universal shriek there rush'd,
> Louder than the loud ocean, like a crash
> Of echoing thunder ; and then all was hush'd,
> Save the wild wind and the remorseless dash
> Of billows ; but at intervals there gush'd,
> Accompanied with a convulsive splash,
> A solitary shriek, the bubbling cry
> Of some strong swimmer in his agony.[23]

Five-and-twenty stanzas suffice for the maritime disaster. Suwarrow and his Russians need five times the number to make

> an end of Ismail—hapless town !
> Fair flash'd her burning towers o'er Danube's stream,
> And redly ran his blushing waters down.
> The horrid war-whoop and the shriller scream
> Rose still ; but fainter were the thunders grown ;
> Of forty thousand who had mann'd the wall,
> Some hundreds breath'd—the rest were silent all ![24]

Each scene is enough to have founded a reputation; and, with all their transcendent grandeur, the two do not stand alone. All the sixteen Cantos are studded with wit, and even wisdom. Often it is hard to say whether it be one or the other, or both. What of the bitter after-taste of vice?

> There is no sterner moralist than Pleasure![25]

What of the suicide's motive?

> Less from disgust of life than dread of death.[26]

What of the great line, at once anthem to genius, and dirge over a nation?

> Cervantes smiled Spain's chivalry away.[27]

What, finally, of—

> Great Socrates?—And thou, Diviner still,
> Whose lot it is by man to be mistaken,
> And thy pure creed made sanction of all ill?
> Redeeming worlds to be by bigots shaken,
> How was thy toil rewarded?[28]

Then, too, it harbours the noble lyric:

> The Isles of Greece, the Isles of Greece!
> Where burning Sappho loved and sung,
> Where grew the arts of war and peace,
> Where Delos rose, and Phoebus sprung!
> Eternal summer gilds them yet,
> But all, except their sun, is set.
>
> The mountains look on Marathon—
> And Marathon looks on the sea;
> And musing there an hour alone,
> I dream'd that Greece might still be free;
> For standing on the Persians' grave,
> I could not deem myself a slave![29]

And the gleams of tenderness! Poetry offers few more

delightful portraits among its myriad of girlhood than that of the daughter of

> the mildest manner'd man
> That ever scuttled ship, or cut a throat—

innocently guilty Haidée :

> Round her she made an atmosphere of life.
> The very air seem'd lighter from her eyes,
> They were so soft and beautiful, and rife
> With all we can imagine of the skies,
> And pure as Psyche ere she grew a wife—
> Too pure even for the purest human ties ;
> Her overpowering presence made you feel
> It would not be idolatry to kneel.[30]

The chant of the Ave Maria ! sighs about the figures of the boy and girl lovers, as if to condone the irregularity in their wooing, while

> not a breath crept through the rosy air,
> And yet the forest-leaves seem'd stirr'd with prayer.[31]

Pathos is a scarce quality in Don Juan. It is to be prized in proportion where it is perceptible, as in the invocation of the Evening Star :

> Whate'er our household gods protect of dear,
> Are gather'd round us by thy look of rest ;
> Thou bring'st the child, too, to the mother's breast ;[32]

and again in a classical allusion :

> When Nero perish'd by the justest doom,
> Amidst the roar of liberated Rome,
> Some hands unseen strew'd flowers upon his tomb.[33]

Is it pathos, or merely an epigram ?

> And if I laugh at any mortal thing,
> 'Tis that I may not weep ![34]

In the present day it is easy to decry Byron's reflections,

his sentiment, as superficial and second-hand. Were they of the present date they might be. When he wrote he was a discoverer, a leader, a teacher. The fire which he kindled had inflamed himself first. His character, or what he chose should be accepted as it, may be read in every verse he printed. Every tale of his, every scene, every thought, breathes, and has life—breath of his life—in it. There is a splendour, a gaiety. His egotism may be ridiculous; he is not. With all the perversity, vanity, pretence, a feeling even of open air, of frank directness, mingles. Shades of a mighty company of real mourners, who attended yearly, daily,

The pageant of his bleeding heart,

still brood over his memory. Human nature loves to recognize a master; and it recognized him. Still, after three quarters of a century, he continues to reign, if within narrowed frontiers, a king by right divine.

The Poetical Works of Lord Byron (Oxford Edition). Henry Frowde: London, 1904.

[1] The Destruction of Sennacherib (Hebrew Melodies), st. 2.
[2] Ode to Napoleon Buonaparte (Occasional Pieces), st. 7.
[3] The Dream, July, 1816 (ibid.).
[4] She Walks in Beauty (Hebrew Melodies), st. 1.
[5] Stanzas for Music, March, 1815 (Occasional Pieces), st. 5.
[6] The Corsair, Canto iii, st. 1.
[7] The Giaour. [8] The Bride of Abydos, Canto ii, st. 1.
[9] Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, Canto i, st. 38.
[10] Ibid., Canto iv, st. 3.
[11] Ibid., Canto iv, stanzas 57 and 59.
[12] Ibid., Canto iv, st. 79. [13] Ibid., Canto iv, st. 146.
[14] Ibid., Canto iv, st. 110. [15] Ibid., Canto iv, st. 87
[16] Ibid., Canto iv, st. 99.
[17] Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, Canto iii, st. 92.
[18] Ibid., Canto iv, st. 28. [19] Ibid., Canto iii, st. 77.
[20] Ibid., Canto iii, st. 106. [21] Ibid., Canto iii, st. 107.
[22] Ibid., Canto iv, st. 54.

[23] Don Juan, Canto ii, stanzas 52–3.
[24] Ibid., Canto viii, st. 127.
[25] Ibid., Canto iii, st. 65.
[26] Ibid., Canto xiv, st. 4.
[27] Ibid., Canto xiii, st. 11.
[28] Ibid., Canto xv, st. 18.
[29] Ibid., Canto iii, st. 86, Hymn, stanzas 1, 3.
[30] Ibid., Canto iii, st. 74.
[31] Ibid., Canto iii, st. 102.
[32] Ibid., Canto iii, st. 107.
[33] Ibid., Canto iii, st. 109.
[34] Ibid., Canto iv, st. 4.

PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY

1792—1822

THE first and foremost impression of Shelley is of a spirit of unrest—though something besides restlessness—brooding —no, hovering, swooping—over ever fresh plans for ever fresh Creations, which it is to engineer. We are conscious of a continual search by him for new elements whence to construct new Heavens and a new earth. It is the French Revolution, exhausted, crushed by main force for the moment below the surface, panting, protesting, fermenting, in a haughty English, aristocratic nature. Visibly and audibly it is rebellious and scornful. It has idealized passion, erecting it into a divine law. Hither and thither it rushes, raising an altar wherever fancy has alighted for the instant. Never without an idol, it tramples on whatever is no longer for it adorable. All must acknowledge the fascination of each fresh conception, if only it were permitted to stay long enough for a day-dream to repose in it. There is a longing to inform with a body each exhalation as it rises; to condense the rainbow-hued vapour. Alas! the pageant of fairy castles which dissolve into air as we wind the horn at their gates at length disappoints and tires. We begin to doubt whether they be more than gossamers of an intellect uncertain of itself.

Shelley was a born poet, whom nature in a freak bent, and warped, perhaps, also enriched, by the circumstances of his time, parentage, and domicile. Being what thus he was, he could not have been other than a poet professed,

and nothing else. He was endowed with faculties in abundance besides poetic imagination. His prose is delightful. He might have won fame as a novelist, a metaphysician, a religious teacher, a politician. As it was, from boyhood he chose, or, as doubtless he thought, was forced into, a social isolation which denied to his great intelligence any other fixed form of expression than poetry. Made for friendship, to admire, and be admired, to be a disciple, and have disciples, he did not take excommunication kindly. He threw the blame upon existing institutions, a feudal aristocracy, religion degenerated into formalism and priestcraft, statesmen, Courts, and Kings, Heaven itself. Refused an audience otherwise, he uttered his rage and contempt in verse. The narrow circle he joined in default of a larger was debarred by its own isolation from unprejudiced criticism, at once sympathetic and frank. He himself had too much to say, and felt too ardently, to care to stop and meditate. Often his rank exuberance is owing to the chase of a succession of fugitive fancies. No sooner has he started one than a second has got up, and set his brain coursing in a fresh direction.

His besetting fault as a poet is excess. Denunciation is pursued to scurrility. Descriptions of natural loveliness lengthen into tedious langour. Vital problems are discussed, at once with too much subtlety, and too little depth. Redundancy damps the fire of Alastor, The Revolt of Islam, Rosalind and Helen, Epipsychidion, The Witch of Atlas, The Masque of Anarchy, Julian and Maddalo. It draws a film over The Sensitive Plant, and even the beauty of Adonais. Indignation raves in the greenness of Queen Mab, with its 'uncultured Hebrews' exulting in 'old Salem's shameful glories', and 'howling hideous praises

to their Demon-God'! It blunts the edge of the more mature satires, Swellfoot the Tyrant, Castlereagh, and the rest. When, as frequently, the resentment is righteous in its origin, its virtue still, as Byron's, is marred by vituperation. The fury of the flame turns the water into steam. However much there is to say, however suggestive the text to be expounded, the inability to know when to stop stifles the effect.

The blemishes are not surprising in the circumstances. There were his self-banishment from home and family, social ostracism, exalted views of duty to Humanity, not invariably carried into practice, a fervent belief in the existence of a conspiracy of Tories and critics to suppress him, and a combination of intellectual and spiritual, perhaps even social, pride with physical and moral shyness. Add the gifts, in such a medley insidiously and peculiarly dangerous, of an infallible sense of harmony in words, and a vast mine of fancy. Take the whole together; and we have a clue to the flaws of Alastor and its successors, and to their as extraordinary beauties also. The entire realm of poetry can show nothing so phenomenal. It was a strange universe, paradoxically monstrous, as paradoxically ideal, which spread before the poet's eyes. Turned back upon himself, he had fed upon, and held incessant communion with, his own imagination. He could paint the most realistic of landscapes; scenes we see with our eyes shut; as of the Pisan pine forest, where

> the multitudinous
> Billows murmur at our feet;
> And the earth and ocean meet;[1]

or of the Euganean Hills, in

> the noon of autumn's glow;[2]

but a fancy like his was independent of actual observation.

He could at will be in the Tropics, fanned

> With the breeze murmuring in the musical woods,

or in an Aegean isle,

> Beautiful as a wreck of Paradise.

In a few moments he had passed in fancy from beauty to horror, from a June garden's

> fresh odour, sent
> From the turf, like the voice and the instrument,

to its decay, weeds and toad-stools rotting,

> flake by flake,
> Till the thick stalk stuck like a murderer's stake,
> Where rags of loose flesh yet tremble on high,
> Infecting the winds that wander by.[3]

It is not nature ; it is a reflection of a picture discerned within, with some help from books, and projected into verse. So with the characters moving over the mirror his poems present. The reader sees nothing, none, that he has ever beheld, or that he supposes had ever been beheld. He feels that the narrator has chosen to imprison himself within his own spacious but tortuous being, and there and thence has spun a whole universe, Hell and Heaven, and chiefly Hell.

The voluminous works upon which, within a term not much prolonged beyond that of Adonais, he spent the uttermost of his extraordinary powers, demonstrate their own weight and compass. Consider, for instance, the Prometheus Unbound and the Cenci. The Prometheus raises tremendous problems, and solves none of them. The hero of the drama is himself a problem unanswered. It is unintelligible why, if peace was to be made on the conditions hazily indicated, the conflict between him and Zeus need ever have arisen. Yet the Play, unsatisfactory as it essentially is, satisfies us sufficiently of its author's genius.

In the conception it is as much a torso as an actual, confessed fragment, like the Hyperion of Keats. But it is colossal. In its ways of thought and style it is, moreover, an exact type of its author's common manner. The Cenci belongs to a different class altogether. It is a triumph, in the coldness of its horrors, over the temptation to its creator, being what he was, to burst all the barriers of tragic art. The spirit is not Aeschylean; not Shakespearean. There is some analogy to Marlowe, only with more depth and fineness of thought. Alas! for the ugliness of the theme!

The phenomenon is that, while it and the Prometheus are curiously unlike, both are absolutely and equally representative of their author in one essential respect. Independent as many poets are, determined to follow their own bias, even insolent to the reading world, they have an eye to it nevertheless; they evidently have weighed how they can most certainly render themselves audible to it. It would be difficult to match Shelley in the singleness of his regard to himself alone as he writes. Doubtless he would have liked to be popular. He never endeavoured to attain that end by consulting public tastes. He has general sympathies; not the sympathy which is at pains to comprehend a different point of view from one's own. Paradox as it seems, it is one of the explanations of the peculiar Shelley cult. Never was there a body of writings which to the initiated is a surer index of the author's mind, which admits reverent students, enamoured even of defects, to more intimate communion with it, for the very reason that it never appears to be looking to opinion outside. Had Shelley cared for external favour, he might have corrected diffuseness in diction and obscurity in ideas; he would have had a larger public, and fewer worshippers.

The serene unconsciousness that his readers have their

likes and dislikes, which he might at least try to understand though without deferring to them, applies to all his work. He takes account so far of society about him as to lecture it on its shortcomings. He never learned that pity teaches how to cure. The apartness is the more instead of the less palpable that his inspiration constantly uses his fellow men for a text, yet accepts no light from them. Unless for adoration, of which we are not all capable, we cannot come close to his spirit.

Fortunately for lovers of celestial melody, as well as for his fame, nature had united with the metaphysical, mystical, iconoclastic egotist the sweetest of instinctive singers. Suddenly there would issue a gush of music, absolutely pure, ethereal, yet with warm blood coursing through. His songs among them represent all the beauties possible for the expression of regretful longing, bitter-sweet; the sharp-cut neatness and elegance of a Greek epigram; mystery, pathos, upbraiding, self-upbraiding. There are passionateness, self-restraint. Movement commonly is there; sometimes, if very rarely, dancing joy, with cascades of breezy, glowing images. Unison of words and rhythm never fails. Here are a few flowers, plucked as they came to my hand. I have not attempted to arrange them. They could not jar or clash, any more than colours in a bed of roses.

He has imagined an Indian lover serenading his mistress:

I arise from dreams of thee
In the first sweet sleep of night,
When the winds are breathing low,
And the stars are shining bright;
I arise from dreams of thee,
And a spirit in my feet
Hath led me—who knows how?
To thy chamber-window, Sweet!

The wandering airs they faint
On the dark, the silent stream—
And the Champak's odours fail
Like sweet thoughts in a dream;
The nightingale's complaint,
It dies upon her heart;—
As I must on thine,
O! belovèd as thou art!

O lift me from the grass!
I die! I faint! I fail!
Let thy love in kisses rain
On my lips and eyelids pale.
My cheek is cold and white, alas!
My heart beats loud and fast;—
Oh! press it to thine own again,
Where it will break at last.[4]

Here is wreckage from the all-but forgotten experiment of a drama on Charles the First:

A widow bird sate mourning for her love
Upon a wintry bough;
The frozen wind crept on above,
The freezing stream below.

There was no leaf upon the forest bare,
No flower upon the ground,
And little motion in the air
Except the mill-wheel's sound.[5]

What a spell—from old Hellas—is in Pan's piping!

From the forests and highlands
We come, we come;
From the river-girt islands,
Where loud waves are dumb
Listening to my sweet pipings.
The wind in the reeds and the rushes,
The bees on the bells of thyme,
The birds on the myrtle bushes,
The cicale above in the lime,

And the lizards below in the grass,
Were as silent as ever old Tmolus was,
Listening to my sweet pipings.

Liquid Peneus was flowing,
And all dark Tempe lay
In Pelion's shadow, outgrowing
The light of the dying day,
Speeded by my sweet pipings.
The Sileni, and Sylvans, and Fawns,
And the Nymphs of the woods and waves,
To the edge of the moist river-lawns,
And the brink of the dewy caves,
And all that did then attend and follow
Were silent with love, as you now, Apollo,
With envy of my sweet pipings.

I sang of the dancing stars,
I sang of the daedal Earth,
And of Heaven—and the giant wars,
And Love, and Death, and Birth,—
And then I changed my pipings,—
Singing how down the vale of Menalus
I pursued a maiden and clasped a reed;
Gods and men, we are all deluded thus!
It breaks in our bosom and then we bleed
All wept, as I think both ye now would,
If envy or age had not frozen your blood,
At the sorrow of my sweet pipings.[6]

His favourite strain is sorrowing sometimes softened by recollections of past happiness:

Music, when soft voices die,
Vibrates in the memory—
Odours, when sweet violets sicken,
Live within the sense they quicken.
Rose leaves, when the rose is dead,
Are heaped for the belovèd's bed;
And so thy thoughts, when thou art gone,
Love itself shall slumber on;—[7]

more generally abetted, and embittered, by the image of joys past recalling :

Rarely, rarely comest thou,
  Spirit of Delight !
Wherefore has thou left me now
  Many a day and night?
Many a weary night and day
'Tis since thou art fled away.

How shall ever one like me
  Win thee back again ?
With the joyous and the free
  Thou wilt scoff at pain.
Spirit false ! thou hast forgot
All but those who need thee not.

I love all that thou lovest,
  Spirit of Delight !
The fresh Earth in new leaves drest,
  And the starry night ;
Autumn evening, and the morn
When the golden mists are born.

I love snow, and all the forms
  Of the radiant frost ;
I love waves, and winds, and storms,
  Everything almost
Which is Nature's, and may be
Untainted by man's misery.

I love Love—though he has wings,
  And like light can flee,
But above all other things,
  Spirit, I love thee—
Thou art love and life ! O come,
Make once more my heart thy home.[8]

Not, forsooth, that its return to a dying world, to his worse than dying self, is possible, or, perhaps, to be desired !

Oh, world! oh, life! oh, time!
On whose last steps I climb
  Trembling at that where I had stood before;
When will return the glory of your prime?
  No more—O, never more!

Out of the day and night
A joy has taken flight;
  Fresh spring, and summer, and winter hoar,
Move my faint heart with grief, but with delight
  No more—O, never more! [9]

The power even to love is lost to him; and the one hope he has is that his need of pity may be accepted by the object of his supplication as a substitute:

One word is too often profaned
  For me to profane it,
One feeling too falsely disdained
  For thee to disdain it.
One hope is too like despair
  For prudence to smother,
And pity from thee more dear
  Than that from another.

I can give not what men call love,
  But wilt thou accept not
The worship the heart lifts above,
  And the Heavens reject not,
The desire of the moth for the star,
  Of the night for the morrow,
The devotion to something afar
  From the sphere of our sorrow? [10]

Though what right to expect anything in barter for a lifeless heart!

  When the lamp is shattered
The light in the dust lies dead.
  When the cloud is scattered
The rainbow's glory is shed.

When the lute is broken,
Sweet tunes are remembered not;
When the lips have spoken,
Loved accents are soon forgot.

As music and splendour
Survive not the lamp and the lute,
The heart's echoes render
No song when the spirit is mute:—
No song but sad dirges,
Like the wind through a ruined cell,
Or the mournful surges
That ring the dead seaman's knell.[11]

The mere diction has enchantment in it; and in that respect the specimens I have offered are very far from monopolizing the charms of their class. Many others are their equals. Some, which are too long to be set out at all fully, as well as too familiarly known to need recalling, are their superiors. Mark the dazzling series of glowing, glorious images dedicated to the Skylark. The whole is a golden staircase up which the song winds, step by step, heavenwards.[12] As overwhelmingly from the wings of its sister The Cloud, itself 'nursling of the sky', are:

shaken the dews that waken
The sweet buds every one,
When rocked to rest on their mother's breast,
As she dances about the sun.[13]

Whatever the minstrel's temper of the moment, the music never fails. The wild west wind, 'dirge of the dying year',[14] at his 'incantation', becomes an organ to voice his gloom. When the fit shifts, river goddesses dance and carol in sympathy with his instant of gaiety:

Gliding and springing
She went, ever singing,

In murmurs as soft as sleep;
The Earth seemed to love her,
And Heaven smiled above her
As she lingered towards the deep.[15]

As for the poet himself, I do not suppose that he would even have understood the bestowal of praise for form and symmetry. In hymning Pan or Alpheus he was no more striving consciously to attract by the grace of rhythm than in the grandly intolerant Ode to Liberty.[16] Search him through and through for depth, for essence, of thought; you will find nothing to beat the biting irony of the boast of Ozymandias; and where among his words for music is melody more sufficing than in that perfect sonnet?

I met a traveller from an antique land
Who said: two vast and trunkless legs of stone
Stand in the desert. Near them on the sand,
Half sunk, a shattered visage lies, whose frown,
And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command,
Tell that its scupltor well those passions read
Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things,
The hand that mocked them, and the heart that fed:
And on the pedestal these words appear:
'My name is Ozymandias, King of Kings:
Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!'
Nothing beside remains. Round the decay
Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare
The lone and level sands stretch far away.[17]

Simply his impulse, the current of his spirit, happened in a song to use the same channel as common human feeling. He desired to express an emotion or conception; and by chance it was definite enough not to need to stretch and strain his native instinct of ear. The uninitiated, who profit by the coincidence, ought not to flatter themselves that the fanatic of ideas meant to sacrifice the least of them

for their pleasure. From first to last he has been seeking to embody, to interpret, a vision, a mystery. It has mattered nothing to him whether the text were a flaw in the Universe, or a cloud in the West ; the snapping of a lute's chords, or the death of Adonais ;[18] an ode to the lark, or a psalm on Intellectual Beauty—not the less profound that it is as lovely also as

> music by the night-wind sent
> Thro' strings of some still instrument,
> Or moonlight on a midnight stream ![19]

Mere ordinary lovers of poetry must accept Shelley for that he is ; be content that he sings for himself, not for them. Happily for them they cannot be inhibited from listening. Though they have not bought the privilege by discovering wisdom in Julian and Maddalo, or by entering into the inner meaning of Epipsychidion, at least they will understand the possibilities of English verse from the pen of a master ; they will be sensible of a rapture of melody. And there may be more ; great minds—and Shelley's, with all its freaks, was great—have much to tell even to those who are not their disciples.

The Poetical Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley, edited by Harry Buxton Forman. Four vols. Reeves and Turner, 1876.

[1] To Jane, Invitation to the Pine Forest, vv. 65–7.
[2] Lines, Written among the Euganean Hills, vv 286–93.
[3] The Sensitive Plant, Part I, vv. 15–16 ; and Part III, vv. 66–9.
[4] The Indian Serenade. [5] Charles the First, Sc. 5.
[6] Hymn of Pan. [7] To ——.
[8] Song, stanzas 1, 2, 5, 6, 8. [9] A Lament.
[10] To ——. [11] Lines, stanzas 1–2.
[12] To a Skylark. [13] The Cloud, vv. 5–8.
[14] Ode to the West Wind. [15] Arethusa, st. 1.
[16] Ode to Liberty. [17] Ozymandias.
[18] Adonais (Elegy on the Death of John Keats).
[19] Hymn to Intellectual Beauty, st. 3.

JOHN KEATS

1795—1821

ENDYMION surprised and shocked the lingering orthodoxy of late Georgian critics. Its author provoked as much animosity as Wordsworth, and more than Byron. Wordsworth bore no relation to the idols of their youth, Dryden and Pope. Byron, and Scott also, affected to revere both. Reviewers simply did not understand Shelley. Endymion was the worst of rebels. It had borrowed and travestied myths of the Greek Classics, and the metre of English Masters. Many real faults indeed may be found in it. The plot wanders, and perpetually loses itself. The narrative, often the descriptions, are prolix and tedious. The diction is troubled with strange words and phrases. The rhyme tends to lead the sense. Not rarely the ideas are thin in comparison with the parade of the circumstances meant to wait upon them. Occasionally the prosaic will obtrude itself; cotton-backing showing under velvet pile. But then the golden autumnal haze, the delicious uncertainty what visions of romance will next come and go from and into happy Dreamland! The age was one of muddy perturbation—strifes of peoples against kings, and kings against peoples, of mortal struggles between agrarianism and feudalism, labour and capital, political economy and an outworn Faith. Imagine, for the few belated Elizabethans, the joy in this pageant of Olympian goddesses haunting the happy pastures of Arcadian hills!

It is in truth an Elizabethan poet's world. The Elizabethan idea of poetry breathes throughout. Laws of

physical nature are suspended. Men ride on eagles' wings, walk the sea, and sojourn in ocean caves. No whisper of wranglings of statesmen, discontents, and hunger of the seething masses, stirs the serene solitude. Fields and woodlands are governed by no human law, and need none. The cares are not of a kind to be inflamed or lulled by the lyre of a Tyrtaeus. The author of Endymion had drunk deep from the fountains of Sidney, Spenser, and William Browne ; of Shakespeare—the singer of Venus and Adonis, of Lucrece, and the Sonnets. He had learnt to move in an upper air of his own, as they in theirs. Where, in his models, a tincture of a purpose had intervened, he stopped short. He would have abhorred to enlist, like his beloved Spenser, the Muse in the service of a moral allegory. For him poetry was no minister to duty, as understood outside. No painful requisition of self-denial was imposed upon it by the laws of its being. Endymion, without a sting of the conscience remoulded for poetic use on Hellenic lines, even might wave back to the skies his dream-mistress. He is not liable to a shadow of reproach for wooing and winning, before he was properly off with the old love, a dusky and more tangible mate :

> No more of dreaming.—Now,
> Where shall our dwelling be ? [1]

For poets in general the one inspiring motto is :

> A thing of beauty is a joy for ever ; [2]

for the universe, the eternal law,

> That first in beauty should be first in might ; [3]

and for himself :

> Beauty is truth, truth beauty—that is all
> Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.[4]

The whole is immature. Had Keats lived, not impossibly

he might have wished to suppress it as a crude and juvenile experiment :

A young bird's flutter from a wood.

A couple of years from its publication ; and the singer reappeared before the world with the Eve of St. Agnes, Hyperion, Lamia, Isabella, and a galaxy of lovely odes ! In the brief interval he had achieved perfection ! Not the faintest symptom of youthful extravagance—forcible weakness—is to be traced. The orderliness and harmony of treatment are unimpeachable. To warmth is added a refined delicacy. There is sensuousness still, but never in excess. Between Endymion and its immediate successors, whatever the dates of their composition, the contrast is extraordinary. Yet, when I refer it and them to their common author, I doubt much that the later wonders could ever have come into visible, recognized existence without the prior partial failure !

Endymion is a miscellany—a nursery garden of imagination. It provided a seed-bed for the blooms to follow, several even now germinating. But it did much more. The difference in years between its poet and the poet of the Eve of St. Agnes is little. In respect of the conception of the two, it is nothing. As between them in the completed form, it means an absolute transformation of the creative spirit. Moving and breathing, Endymion laid bare to its author all the snares and perils of his exuberant fancy. While it demonstrated his powers to himself, and spurred his pride, it warned, threatened, and shamed. With its grotesquenesses, the more apparent for the beauties, full before his eyes, his fastidiously sensitive self was secured against repeating offences of rank efflorescence of imagery, confusion of thought, rawness of colour and tone. If never in the history of verse has fancy been accorded more liberty, and has

abused it less, than in Keats's later work, the main credit I believe to be due to the poet's shock at being confronted by his own creation flaunting in the broad day of type its dishevelled and unabashed charms. It may almost be said that in no famous English poem is want of method, measure, proportion, more flagrant than in Endymion. 'Post', and, in my opinion, 'propter' Endymion, on the other hand, no quality in the writer is more conspicuous than completeness of workmanship. That stands out from the multitude of admirable properties in the gallery of his masterpieces. Atmosphere, lights, shades, perspective, are all in their right places. Imagination always satisfies, and never cloys.

The temple of his poet-being, thus re-edified, he dedicated to the goddess Beauty, with Melancholy for her chief ministress—dainty Melancholy :

> She dwells with Beauty—Beauty that must die;
> And Joy, whose hand is ever at his lips
> Bidding adieu; and aching Pleasure nigh,
> Turning to poison while the bee-mouth sips;
> Ay, in the very temple of Delight
> Veil'd Melancholy has her sovran shrine,
> Though seen of none save him whose strenuous tongue
> Can burst Joy's grape against his palate fine;
> His soul shall taste the sadness of her might,
> And be among her cloudy trophies hung.[5]

We have no right to be astonished at his inclination to the pensiveness, the remoteness, the solitariness of soul, which he intends by 'Melancholy'. Intellectually, even apart from disease, he was framed to take little interest in the world into which he was born. He thought and felt himself into another, two centuries earlier. In that world itself he troubled his fancy with none of the active cares and struggles. Its very books he did not read as an antiquary

or student. The air of it which he breathed he had distilled for his individual use. Its gardens which he paced he had himself enclosed and planted. Over the whole he drew an atmosphere, a veil, of slumberous calm—not from Spring, but from more companionable Autumn :

Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness!
Close bosom-friend of the maturing sun;
Conspiring with him how to load and bless
With fruit the vines that round the thatch-eaves run;
To bend with apples the moss'd cottage trees,
And fill all fruit with ripeness to the core.
. . . . . .
Who hath not seen thee oft amid thy store?
Sometimes whoever seeks abroad may find
Thee sitting careless on a granary floor,
Thy hair soft-lifted by the winnowing wind;
Or on a half-reap'd furrow sound asleep,
Drowsed with the fume of poppies, while thy hook
Spares the next swath and all its twined flowers;
And sometime like a gleaner thou dost keep
Steady thy laden head across a brook;
Or by a cider-press, with patient look,
Thou watchest the last oozings, hours by hours.

Where are the songs of Spring? Ay, where are they?
Think not of them, thou hast thy music too,
While barred clouds bloom the soft-dying day,
And touch the stubble-plains with rosy hue;
Then in a wailful choir the small gnats mourn
Among the river sallows, borne aloft
Or sinking as the light wind lives or dies;
And full-grown lambs loud bleat from hilly bourn;
Hedge-crickets sing; and now with treble soft
The red-breast whistles from a garden-croft,
And gathering swallows twitter in the skies.[6]

If mirth ever feigns to inspire him, it is not easily distinguishable from sadness. At all events, it is that of the bygone past; an echo from

Souls of poets dead and gone,[7]

reposing

on Elysian lawns
Browsed by none but Dian's fawns;
Underneath large blue-bells tented,
Where the daisies are rose-scented;
Where the nightingale doth sing
Not a senseless, tranced thing,
But divine melodious truth;
Philosophic numbers smooth;
Tales and golden histories
Of heaven and its mysteries;[8]

yet still at times sighing to one another:

What Elysium have we known,
Happy field or mossy cavern,
Choicer than the Mermaid Tavern?[9]

Or it may be monumental gaiety; imprisoned in sculptured stone, amid myrrh-scented funeral ashes:

What leaf-fringed legend haunts about thy shape
Of deities or mortals, or of both,
In Tempe, or the dales of Arcady?
What men or gods are these? What maidens loath?
What mad pursuit? What struggle to escape?
What pipes and timbrels? What wild ecstasy?

Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard
Are sweeter; therefore, ye soft pipes, play on;
Not to the sensual ear, but, more endear'd,
Pipe to the spirit ditties of no tone;
Fair youth, beneath the trees, thou canst not leave
Thy song, nor ever can those trees be bare;
Bold Lover, never, never canst thou kiss,
Though winning near the goal—yet, do not grieve;
She cannot fade, though thou hast not thy bliss,
For ever wilt thou love, and she be fair!

. . . . . .

Who are these coming to the sacrifice?
To what green altar, O mysterious priest,

Lead'st thou that heifer lowing at the skies,
And all her silken flanks with garlands drest ?
What little town by river or sea-shore,
Or mountain-built with peaceful citadel,
Is emptied of its folk, this pious morn ?
And, little town, thy streets for evermore
Will silent be ; and not a soul to tell
Why thou art desolate, can e'er return.[10]

Melancholy, after all, with its frozen revelry ; though not so lingeringly, hauntingly saddening as the full life of the Nightingale song :

My heart aches, and a drowsy numbness pains
My sense, as though of hemlock I had drunk,
Or emptied some dull opiate to the drains
One minute past, and Lethe-wards had sunk;
'Tis not through envy of thy happy lot,
But being too happy in thy happiness,—
That thou, light-winged Dryad of the trees,
In some melodious plot
Of beechen green, and shadows numberless,
Singest of summer in full-throated ease.

. . . . . .

Darkling I listen ; and for many a time
I have been half in love with easeful Death,
Call'd him soft names in many a mused rhyme,
To take into the air my quiet breath ;
Now more than ever seems it rich to die,
To cease upon the midnight with no pain,
While thou art pouring forth thy soul abroad
In such an ecstasy !
Still wouldst thou sing, and I have ears in vain—
To thy high requiem become a sod.

Thou wast not born for death, immortal Bird !
No hungry generations tread thee down ;
The voice I hear this passing night was heard
In ancient days by emperor and clown :

Perhaps the self-same song that found a path
Through the sad heart of Ruth, when, sick for home,
She stood in tears amid the alien corn;
The same that oft-times hath
Charm'd magic casements, opening on the foam
Of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn.

Forlorn! the very word is like a bell
To toll me back from thee to my sole self!
Adieu! the fancy cannot cheat so well
As she is famed to do, deceiving elf.
Adieu! adieu! thy plaintive anthem fades
Past the near meadows, over the still stream,
Up the hill-side; and now 'tis buried deep
In the next valley-glades:
Was it a vision, or a waking dream?
Fled is that music:—do I wake or sleep?[11]

Melancholy, and Beauty, hand in hand—very marvels! But I must add another marvel—this an example of consummate art—the Chapman-Homer sonnet:

Much have I travell'd in the realms of gold,
And many goodly states and kingdoms seen:
Round many western islands have I been
Which bards in fealty to Apollo hold.
Oft of one wide expanse had I been told
That deep-brow'd Homer ruled as his demesne:
Yet did I never breathe its pure serene,
Till I heard Chapman speak out loud and bold:
Then felt I like some watcher of the skies
When a new planet swims into his ken:
Or like stout Cortez when with eagle eyes
He stared at the Pacific—and all his men
Look'd at each other with a wild surmise—
Silent, upon a peak in Darien.[12]

Had Keats written no more than such a sonnet and such odes, he must have ranked among the highest in song. He found time, however, in his brief and sorely tried span of life to work on larger canvases, and never without a

triumph. The Eve of St. Agnes, Isabella, Lamia, Hyperion, breathe, all four, of the same creative soul. Each is radiantly distinct. Among their many brilliant qualities not the least amazing is, for the proximity in the dates of their birth, this absolute variety.

Exquisiteness of detail, always harmonious, characterizes the first. Many a painter could testify, not without a pang, how provocative is the poet's challenge to work up to the glowing frame in which he has set his sweet Madeline, and how unequal the competition !—

A casement high and triple-arch'd there was,
All garlanded with carven imageries
Of fruits, and flowers, and bunches of knot-grass,
And diamonded with panes of quaint device,
Innumerable of stains and splendid dyes,
As are the tiger-moth's deep-damask'd wings ;
And in the midst, 'mong thousand heraldries,
And twilight saints, and dim emblazonings,
A shielded scutcheon blush'd with blood of queens and kings.

Full on this casement shone the wintry moon,
And threw warm gules on Madeline's fair breast,
As down she knelt for heaven's grace and boon ;
Rose-bloom fell on her hands, together prest,
And on her silver cross soft amethyst,
And on her hair a glory, like a saint ;
She seem'd a splendid angel, newly drest,
Save wings, for heaven :—Porphyro grew faint ;
She knelt, so pure a thing, so free from mortal taint.

Soon, trembling in her soft and chilly nest,
In sort of wakeful swoon, perplex'd she lay,
Until the poppied warmth of sleep oppress'd
Her soothed limbs, and soul fatigued away ;
Flown, like a thought, until the morrow-day ;
Blissfully haven'd both from joy and pain ;
Clasp'd like a missal where swart Paynims pray
Blinded alike from sunshine and from rain,
As though a rose should shut, and be a bud again.[13]

Another, and wholly different, note is struck, with very dissimilar, but as delicately suitable accompaniments, in the piteous story of Isabella. Not that aught is allowed to obscure the central figure, almost the peer of Chaucer's Griselda; she bows to the storm of fraternal vengeance on her humble lover; forlorn, tender, unvindictive, and patient, except for the one heart-piercing cry:

> 'for cruel 'tis,' said she,
> 'To steal my Basil-pot away from me.' [14]

In Lamia, on the other hand, it is the plot, rather than the circumstances, or the figures, on which attention is concentrated. On the tale moves to its catastrophe, mysterious, yet foreseen, inevitable, austere, stately, like a great mediaeval noble, in velvet and lace, on his way to Tower Hill.[15]

And finally, the palace door of Keats's splendid fancy flies open for the god—Hyperion—to pass within:

> He enter'd, but he enter'd full of wrath;
> His flaming robes stream'd out beyond his heels,
> And gave a roar, as if of earthly fire,
> That scared away the meek ethereal Hours
> And made their dove-wings tremble. On he flared,
> From stately nave to nave, from vault to vault,
> Through bowers of fragrant and enwreathed light,
> And diamond-paved lustrous long arcades,
> Until he reach'd the great main cupola;
> There, standing fierce beneath, he stampt his foot,
> And from the basements deep to the high towers
> Jarr'd his own golden region; and before
> The quavering thunder thereupon had ceased,
> His voice leapt out, despite of godlike curb,
> To this result: 'O dreams of day and night!
> O monstrous forms! O effigies of pain!
> O spectres busy in a cold, cold gloom!
> O lank-ear'd Phantoms of black-weeded pools!

Why do I know ye? why have I seen ye? why
Is my eternal essence thus distraught
To see and to behold these horrors new?
Saturn is fallen, am I too to fall?
Fall!—No, by Tellus and her briny robes!
Over the fiery frontier of my realms
I will advance a terrible right arm
Shall scare that infant thunderer, rebel Jove,
And bid old Saturn take his throne again.' [16]

Standing forth from the rest with their dainty finish—as of a butterfly fresh from the chrysalis, perfect to the least plume of down—the poem confronts us; a torso, almost a gallery of torsos, which could never have been anything else, as, like its own Sun-God, it enthroned itself

Upon the gold clouds metropolitan

of its creator's brain; yet the grandest, most majestic, conception of all the four!

Loath as I am to emphasize in a master poet quickness of execution any more than youth, I cannot but remember that from two to three years comprise the whole fruitful season of Keats's career. Endymion excepted, in tales, odes, songs, sonnets, ballads, so much unmixed poetic excellence in matter and form has seldom, if ever, been collected within the same compass, with less that the severest critic would dare, or care, to wish away. Never has either happy chance, or unsparing brainwork, done more in an equal term for English poetry. An artist in every line; and to die believing himself a failure at twenty-six!

I should be sorry, I confess, if the waters rising in England's Helicon were such alone as Keats drew up. Temples dedicated to the exclusive worship of the Goddess Beauty are apt to be served by sordid ministers, as well as

Priests of Melancholy. Fanes of the Muses ought to be veritable Pantheons, with room for shrines of all the Graces and Virtues. Tenderness, Lovingkindness, Heroism, Faith, and innocent Joy have a right to make their home there; and a Chapel should be consecrated to Sorrow. Not all in Keats's ideal loveliness is real. The sturdy frequenters of the Mermaid might have mocked at some of the classic forms rising from his pen. Something in the landscape is scene-painting. Rude botanists would scoff at the fairy forests and garden-land of the exiled Titans. No lark carols here with the freshness of the Ayrshire ploughman's. The Muse is bidden to keep company with sculptured funeral urns and the dust therein, instead of kindling living hearts.

But I repent. Let me be forgiven for having been tempted to dwell on a sombre truism, which, after all, is only a half-truth. Side by side with it stands, as I gladly acknowledge, another, that genius has manifold phases. One poet now and then may be spared from the dull haunts of men to roam, enchanted and enchanting, through moonlit forest glades. It is good to be reminded from time to time that the duty of poetry is not to sew and spin; that its first obligation, to be fulfilled on pain of being not poetry at all, is to be beautiful as a lily of the field. Keats was born in an age of brute military force. Humanity had been vulgarized by political panic or ambition. Ideas with no money or physical power in them were despised. His nature revolted in disgust. In defiance he set up the image of Beauty to be worshipped. At least the service carried men outside their own poor selves; it fascinated, and refined. Who, old or young, can recall the first revelation to him of The Eve of St. Agnes, the Nightingale Ode, Hyperion, without feeling how, while he read, an

ocean seemed to roll before his eyes, as the Iliad, a new planet, swam into the ken of John Keats!

The Poetical Works of John Keats: with a Memoir by Richard Monckton Milnes. New Edition. E. Moxon, 1854.

[1] Endymion, Book IV. [2] Ibid., Book I.
[3] Hyperion. [4] Ode on a Grecian Urn, st. 5.
[5] Ode on Melancholy. [6] To Autumn.
[7] Lines on the Mermaid Tavern. [8] Ode.
[9] Lines on the Mermaid Tavern.
[10] Ode on a Grecian Urn, stanzas 1, 2, 4.
[11] Ode to a Nightingale, stanzas 1, 6, 7, 8.
[12] On First Looking into Chapman's Homer.
[13] The Eve of St. Agnes, stanzas 24, 25, 27.
[14] Isabella; or, The Pot of Basil, st. 62.
[15] Lamia. [16] Hyperion, Book I.

CHARLES WOLFE

1791—1823.

I HAD doubted whether to assign a place to Wolfe's poems rather than to him. Finally, I decided that his nature was too much of a poem for his work not to be classed by his personality. In his schoolboy days at Winchester he was a poet. His lines on the raising of Lazarus show distinct poetic insight. Their note is the feeling of Jesus 'for others' grief':

> He knew what pains must pierce a sister's heart.[1]

It is the same with his prize poem on the Death of Abel:

> Nor could his lips a deep-drawn sigh restrain,
> Not for himself he sigh'd—he sigh'd for Cain.[2]

Throughout a brilliant career at Trinity, Dublin, it was as a poet that he was particularly recognized. An old air could not sound in his ears without hastening to embody itself in melodious verse. His few songs, the poem itself by which he is immortalized, were emotions translated instantly into language. His biographer, who cannot be accused of poetical enthusiasm, describes the effect of music upon his imagination: 'he felt all its poetry; it transported him.' The same friend recollects how, captivated by a national Spanish air, Viva el Rey Fernando, he 'commenced singing it over and over again, until he produced an English song admirably suited to the tune'.[3] He had music in his heart.

There, after the close of his College career, it stayed,

mute, but a sweetening influence. It would be romantic to lay down purity in act as a necessary condition of poetic power. Unfortunately a high sensibility constantly tends to lead astray. Not the less true is it that delicacy of feeling, shrinking from grossness of every sort, generosity, and an ideal capacity for friendship, make the poetry of life. They had always been the essence of Wolfe's, while he still sang. Self-sacrifice caused him to abandon, from fear of paining his mother, early thoughts of the Army. Later, religious devotion led him to abjure versifying. When he cast himself outside his academic circle of worshippers, his passion of charity sustained him in the squalid solitude of a curacy in Tyrone. There it won him the equal adoration of three mutually hostile types of so-called Christianity, agreeing only in common hatred of a fourth, the one he was bound to represent. The good Archdeacon, to whom we owe the sketch of his career, portrays the beautiful modesty, simplicity, piety, sympathy, courage, of the youth with all gentle, well-bred tastes and habits, in his new home, a peasant's cabin. Poetizing, the 'mere inspiration of the Muse', the Archdeacon treats as 'the less important, the less serious' phase of his character. In truth Wolfe was doubtless as essentially a poet in the wilds of Tyrone and Donoughmore as in his Scholar's rooms in Trinity. The splendour of fancy glorified his ruinous, mouldy cottage, and inspired the consolation he carried to many a typhus-stricken hut.

His was a noble spirit, entirely consistent with a poet's, yet not in itself necessarily implying it. When, therefore, I number him with poets by profession, I cannot justify it on the ground of virtues happily not a monopoly of any special vocation. I have to rely on his poetical inspiration; and his fits of that, I am aware, are, as evidenced in print,

to be measured less by years, than by months or weeks, perhaps by days and hours. The actual bulk of his entire poetical production is scanty indeed. Apart from school and college exercises, it consists of half a dozen songs. Several are pretty and graceful. Yet, on their own merits, I could not claim that they would have survived even their author's brief existence. What then remains? Why, beside, rather than among, the meagre rest, just two of the loveliest flowers in the garden of English verse!

The entire Anglo-Saxon world is familiar with the poem on the Burial of Sir John Moore. If I give it here in full, it chiefly is for convenience of comparison with another piece by Wolfe as admirable in a different way:

Not a drum was heard, not a funeral note
  As his corse to the rampart we hurried;
Not a soldier discharged his farewell shot
  O'er the grave where our hero we buried.

We buried him darkly at dead of night,
  The sods with our bayonets turning,
By the struggling moonbeam's misty light
  And the lantern dimly burning.

No useless coffin enclosed his breast,
  Not in sheet or in shroud we wound him;
But he lay like a warrior taking his rest
  With his martial cloak around him.

Few and short were the prayers we said,
  And we spoke not a word of sorrow;
But we steadfastly gazed on the face that was dead,
  And we bitterly thought of the morrow.

We thought as we hollow'd his narrow bed
  And smoothed down his lonely pillow,
That the foe and the stranger would tread o'er his head,
  And we far away on the billow!

Lightly they'll talk of the spirit that 's gone,
And o'er his cold ashes upbraid him—
But little he'll reck if they let him sleep on
In the grave where a Briton has laid him.

But half of our heavy task was done
When the clock struck the hour for retiring
And we heard the distant and random gun
That the foe was sullenly firing.

Slowly and sadly we laid him down,
From the field of his fame fresh and gory ;
We carved not a line, and we raised not a stone—
But we left him alone with his glory ![4]

The whole had flashed out of a casual glance at a flinty paragraph in a superannuated number of the Edinburgh Annual Register. Byron, whose sympathetic eyes it first caught, through no self-advertising by the author, accounted it ' little inferior to the best which the present prolific age had brought forth '.[5] The third stanza—in particular, the second couplet—drew from him the exclamation, ' Perfect ! ' The unpremeditated art itself is excellent. Observe, for example, how the seventh stanza labours in instinctive sympathy with the burden. In absoluteness of pictorial effect the poem has few equals in its kind, no superior. The precise correspondence of the details with the prose narrative, which has been urged in depreciation, in fact greatly enhances the merit. Wolfe's version is identical with its source, except that a soul has been added.

In the lines To Mary the process is, after a manner, reversed. Wolfe found an air of melancholy beauty, Gramachree, deformed by alien, commonplace words. He gave it back its proper significance. In tone and character the song, while matching the Burial of Sir John Moore in loveliness, is, it will, I think, be recognized, so generally

distinct as to indicate that, in Wolfe's poetical career, the phenomenon, the accident, is not his authorship of a couple of paragons of melody, but his omission to add a score of equal marvels :

If I had thought thou couldst have died,
I might not weep for thee ;
But I forgot, when at thy side,
That thou couldst mortal be ;
It never through my mind had past
The time would e'er be o'er,
And I on thee should look my last,
And thou shouldst smile no more.

And still upon that face I look,
And think 'twill smile again ;
And still the thought I will not brook,
That I must look in vain !
But when I speak—thou dost not say,
What thou ne'er left'st unsaid ;
And now I feel, as well I may,
Sweet Mary ! thou art dead.

If thou wouldst stay, e'en as thou art,
All cold and all serene—
I still might press thy silent heart,
And where thy smiles have been !
While e'en thy chill, bleak corse I have,
Thou seemest still mine own ;
But there—I lay thee in thy grave,—
And I am now alone !

I do not think, where'er thou art,
Thou hast forgotten me ;
And I, perhaps, may soothe this heart
In thinking, too, of thee ;
Yet, there was round thee such a dawn
Of light ne'er seen before,
As fancy never could have drawn,
And never can restore ! [6]

In its origin this was at once as spontaneous, and as compulsory, as the other. And yet the unconscious art with which, in the second half of the final stanza, the thought starts, and gleams! Wolfe told an acquaintance that it referred to no real being or incident. Simply he had, as with the Viva el Rey, sung the air over and over, till he burst into a flood of tears, and in that mood wrote.

Both there, and in the genealogy of the Dirge, we have the man; a composite of elements, loftiness, tenderness, sympathy, instinct—the whole a poet. That he was to the end, when, after two years of wasting consumption, he whispered to the affectionate watcher of his death-bed with what almost seems pathetic humour: 'Close this eye, the other is closed already; and, now, farewell!'

Remains of the late Rev. Charles Wolfe, A.B., Curate of Donoughmore, Diocese of Armagh: with a brief memoir of his life, by the Rev. John Russell, M.A., Archdeacon of Clogher Seventh edition. London: Hamilton, Adams & Co., 1838.

[1] Jesus Raising Lazarus.

[2] On the Death of Abel.

[3] Memoir (Remains), pp. 28–9.

[4] Remains, pp. 23–4.

[5] Medwin's Conversations of Lord Byron, 1821–2. New edition, 1824, pp. 133–5.

[6] Remains.

HENRY HART MILMAN

1791—1868

I REMEMBER to have heard from persons old when even I was young, that the sensation stirred by Milman's sacred dramas was comparable with that which attended the appearance of a new poem by Byron. He was hailed as a living proof of the compatibility of poetic genius with religion by the orthodox who were soon to ban him as a schismatic. The enthusiasm subsided sooner than the hostility. It, perhaps they, had a solid foundation in the fact of the great brain and brave heart of their object. He never wrote, whether verse, or history, without the promptings of deep thought and a strong dramatic instinct. From youth upwards he possessed and displayed taste, fancy, a fine ear, thirst for knowledge, and a resolute combativeness.

He leapt into fame with his Newdigate prize for the Apollo Belvidere. Some of the lines are never likely to be forgotten; for instance:

> Heard ye the arrow hurtle in the sky?
> Heard ye the dragon monster's deathful cry?
> In settled majesty of fierce disdain,
> Proud of his might, yet scornful of the slain,
> The heav'nly Archer stands—no human birth,
> No perishable denizen of earth;
> Youth blooms immortal in his beardless face,
> A God in strength, with more than godlike grace;
> All, all divine—no struggling muscle glows,
> Through heaving vein no mantling life-blood flows,
> But animate with deity alone,
> In deathless glory lives the breathing stone.

Beauteous as vision seen in dreamy sleep
By holy maid on Delphi's haunted steep,
Mid the dim twilight of the laurel grove,
Too fair to worship, too divine to love.[1]

But the whole brief poem, excepting the conclusion with its sickly sentimentality, is almost faultless. The Judicium Regale, composed in anticipation of the visit of the Allied Sovereigns to England, followed. Its rhetoric approaches grandeur, notwithstanding that it also has its flaw in an ungenerous vindictiveness towards a fallen foe. Already he virtually had completed Samor, Lord of the Bright City, commenced when he was a lad at Eton. The epic abounds in vivid dramatic situations, for example, the sonorous narrative of King Argantyr's surrender to Samor. Its weakness is a juvenile inclination to rioting in horrors. An instance, by no means exceptional, is the sacrifice by Caswallon's savage ambition to the Gods of Valhalla of his only daughter. He had left her to grow up as a wild flower by Derwent's blue lake :

Like a forgotten lute, play'd on alone
By chance-caressing airs.[2]

The grotesque extravagances themselves, however, testify to power. The whole, in its prodigal expenditure of effects, lurid splashes of colour on acres of canvas, and audacious defiances of history, might well have been material for the growth of a mighty poet.

From the same source issued, in fact, besides a careful, but little read, translation from the Sanscrit, two secular and three religious plays ; and then, in place of the poet, a philosophic historian. Of the plays, Fazio is a piece for the stage ; and accomplished actors have acknowledged its merits as such. The sacred pieces, though in dramatic form, are essentially poems, and as such to be judged.

They have undergone the proper refining from the noisiness, the violence, the absurdities of the boyish epic. Half a century ago the reading public admired the awe, the pity, of Titus meditating, at the head of his army, over doomed Jerusalem :

> 'How boldly doth it front us! how majestically!
> Like a luxurious vineyard, the hill-side
> Is hung with marble fabrics, line o'er line;
> While over all hangs the rich purple eve,
> As conscious of its being her last farewell
> Of light and glory to that fated city.
> And, as our clouds of battle dust and smoke
> Are melted into air, behold the Temple,
> In undisturb'd and lone serenity
> Finding itself a solemn sanctuary
> In the profound of heaven! . . .
> By Hercules! the sight might almost win
> The offended majesty of Rome to mercy.'[3]

It was moved by the prayer—a demand—of defiant Hebrew maidens to Jehovah to repeat against insolent Rome His judgement upon Egypt and her furious King :

> The Lord from out His cloud,
> The Lord look'd down upon the proud;
> And the host drave heavily
> Down the deep bosom of the sea.
>
> With a quick and sudden swell
> Prone the liquid ramparts fell;
> Over horse, and over car,
> Over every man of war,
> Over Pharaoh's crown of gold,
> The loud thundering billows roll'd.
> As the level waters spread,
> Down they sank, they sank like lead,
> Down without a cry or groan.
> And the morning sun that shone

On myriads of bright-armed men,
Its meridian radiance then
Cast on a wide sea, heaving, as of yore,
Against a silent, solitary shore.[4]

The contrast of Christian Miriam's appeal to a merciful Redeemer equally charmed :

'For thou wert born of woman! thou didst come,
Oh Holiest! to this world of sin and gloom,
Not in thy dread omnipotent array;
And not by thunders strew'd
Was thy tempestuous road;
Nor indignation burnt before thee on thy way.
But thee, a soft and naked child,
Thy mother undefiled,
In the rude manger laid to rest
From off her virgin breast.
The heavens were not commanded to prepare
A gorgeous canopy of golden air;
Nor stoop'd their lamps th' enthroned fires on high:
A single silent star
Came wandering from afar,
Gliding uncheck'd and calm along the liquid sky.'[5]

If the Fall of Jerusalem was not obsolete in my boyhood, much less had the Martyr of Antioch lost its powers of fascination. Readers of poetry would have been ashamed to confess ignorance of the converted priestess's vision of Heaven opened :

'What means yon blaze on high?
The empyrean sky
Like the rich veil of some proud fane is rending.
I see the star-paved land
Where all the angels stand,
Even to the highest height in burning rows ascending.

Beyond! ah, who is there
With the white snowy hair?

'Tis He—'tis He, the Son of Man appearing!
At the right hand of One
The darkness of whose throne
That sun-eyed seraph Host behold with awe and fearing.
O'er him the rainbow springs,
And spreads its emerald wings,
Down to the glassy sea his loftiest seat o'erarching.
Hark—thunders from his throne, like steel-clad armies marching—
The Christ! the Christ commands us to his home!
Jesus, Redeemer, Lord, we come, we come, we come!' [6]

It was recognized as a touch of genius when the beauteous martyr, in the very ecstasy of visible acceptance within the celestial halls, manœuvres to spare her aged heathen father the agony of seeing his daughter's blood:

A quick and sudden cry
Of Callias, and a parting in the throng
Proclaim'd her father's coming. Forth she sprang
And clasp'd the frowning headsman's knees, and said—
'I do beseech thee, slay me first and quickly;
'Tis that my father may not see my death!' [7]

Inspiration, indeed, I for one still feel animates the entire substance of the pair of tragedies which have furnished me with my examples. A public satisfied to know Milman from an occasional fragment used as a hymn, like the famous funeral anthem:

Brother, thou art gone before us, and thy saintly soul is flown
Where tears are wiped from every eye, and sorrow is unknown— [8]

misses a large part of the enjoyment incident to such verse itself, when considered amidst its proper circumstances, as a plant in its native soil.

If the third drama, Belshazzar, is less fine in texture, and the melody, the pathos, are more of stage properties, and less evidently spontaneous, I attribute the decline mainly to the subject. The centre, the pivot, of the poem was

necessarily the writing on the Palace-wall; and with that the romance of the Jewish maiden, Benina, has no direct connexion. They move along different lines, which only casually intersect. Nothing could be more manifestly forced than the final grouping of the monarch, his mother, and the Hebrew family. When the Prophet deciphers the blazoned sentence, how glaring again the descent of the poem below the level of the Biblical narrative! Yet here too the authorship is internally capable of identification with that of the earlier dramas. The Jewish girl's soliloquy on the summit of the tower of Bel is full of melancholy harmony. Belshazzar's accomplishment of his pledge to the herald of his doom is marked by a splendid magnanimity:

> Go—lead the Hebrew forth, array'd
> In the proud robe, let all the city hail
> The honour'd of Belshazzar.[9]

We catch the true royal ring both in that and in the fallen monarch's farewell to empire and life.

Some element, I am conscious, is wanting to lift Milman's verse back to the rank which much in it still challenges. The whole glows, but like the sun in a mist. We miss the rays which should glance hither and thither; the spontaneous reflections back from the minds of the readers, and from within the poetry itself. The writer's themes are in themselves exalted and noble. He was equipped by nature and education to develop their lofty qualities. Out of his materials he constructed, in two cases at least, beautiful edifices. Yet we are sensible throughout of a radical want. Here and there it is supplied; but in general we do not feel that to the skilful builder's art, and to a certain fiery appreciation of the qualities of the situation, the author was in the habit of adding something of his own soul. He

does not, like the great singers, produce upon me at all events the impression of having passed the constituents of his poetry through his inner nature, and having set them in their places breathing of it. A perceptible monotony in his strains tells the same tale. He strikes a single key continually, though one of dignity and power. A predestined poet may prefer a particular note ; he will give signs that he has many at his disposal. With all their feebleness, The Hours of Idleness indicated more promise than the magnificent Lord of the Bright City. Nevertheless, it might have been anticipated that, whatever the shortcomings of Samor, at any rate the sacred dramas would practically oblige their author to be a poet still. The poetic void after them, unless for a few hymns and translations, during two-thirds of a lifetime inflicts a shock as at a sudden darkness. I can only surmise a mental revolution.

A similar spiritual change dried up, or sealed, the fountains of song in two other modern singers, a senior and a junior, far more subtle, and of wider compass, if not of a stronger intelligence. Both, early in middle life, turned from construction to analysis. The critical faculty in Coleridge took the shape of theological metaphysics. In Matthew Arnold it was a rage for the clearance of rubbish ; for the business, to be understood in a highly complimentary sense, of a moral and literary dust-destructor. It became in Milman inquiry into the bases of ecclesiastical history. Throughout this second stage of his intellectual development he did good, even great, work. There was creation as well as demolition. He pulled down that he might build up. Yet some will regret with me, for the sake both of poetry, and of his fame, that the mortar of the foundations he renewed had to be mixed with the life-blood

of possible fresh Sieges of Jerusalem and Martyrs of Antioch. As the fabric of Latin Christianity slowly rose, I used at Oxford to hear eternity predicted for it. I suspect it will be a phenomenon in the history of Histories if the fruits of the great Dean's imagination do not outlive those of his research.

The Poetical Works of the Rev. H. H. Milman. Three vols. John Murray, 1839. (Also: The Fall of Jerusalem, 1825, New edition. The Martyr of Antioch, 1823, New Edition. Belshazzar, 1822. John Murray.)

[1] The Belvidere Apollo. [2] Samor, Lord of the Bright City.
[3] The Fall of Jerusalem: A Dramatic Poem
[4] Ibid. [5] Ibid.
[6] The Martyr of Antioch: A Dramatic Poem.
[7] Ibid. [8] Ibid.
[9] Belshazzar: A Dramatic Poem.

JOHN KEBLE

1792—1866

Canon Ainger, an admirable critic, once commented to me on the claim of the writer of a popular hymn to respect as a poet: 'You know, the standard of poetic merit in hymns is not high.' Is it necessary to plead for saintly Keble's poetic title, as it were, *in forma pauperis?* He wrote, indeed, other verse, some of it of worth; for example, a delightful appeal of wild flowers to the lord of the manor to spare from his high farming:

> Shady spots and nooks, where we
> Yet may flourish, safe and free.[1]

But, as a whole, it is inconsiderable; and by his hymns he must virtually be judged. Without going, therefore, outside The Christian Year and Lyra Innocentium, I am glad for my own sake to be able from them to answer my question—limited, as it is—in the negative. I find genuine poetic sensibility in a fair proportion of their contents. Tenderness, sympathy, judgement, and delicacy, aspirations after the noble and sublime, are there. Everywhere I observe a feeling for beauty, a sincere longing to understand and interpret Nature.

Every one has felt the sweetness of some five or six stanzas of the Evening Hymn in The Christian Year. Occasional Thoughts on children's troubles in the Lyra Innocentium almost match them.[2] With equal intuition and affectionateness Keble draws happy lessons from sickness, the heart's self-doubtings, mourning, and death. At times, not

often, he nears sublimity; as when he imagines Christ's Passion in the Garden of Gethsemane;[3] when he follows the spirit of the Crucified

> At large among the dead;[4]

or, as by the Saviour's side, muses on the lone upland above the waters of Gennesaret.

He is nevertheless more at home where he habitually dwelt; that is, amid scenes of natural grace and beauty. They make for him fitting framework for every word of Prophet and Evangelist. He had sat at Wordsworth's feet, and learnt to register each

> soft touch invisible,[5]

by which Nature, newly born at every successive sunrise, works her wonders. He could have written a monograph on

> the soft green willow springing
> Where the waters gently pass,
> Every way her free arms flinging
> O'er the moist and reedy grass;[6]

and volumes on the flowers of the field:

> Sweet nurslings of the vernal skies,
> Bath'd in soft airs, and fed with dew;
> What more than magic in you lies,
> To fill the heart's fond view?
>
> Relics ye are of Eden's bowers,
> As pure, as fragrant, and as fair,
> As when ye crown'd the sunshine hours
> Of happy wanderers there.[7]

Mountains, in particular, he loved for their peculiar companionship, as he deemed, with Heaven:

> Where is thy favour'd haunt, eternal Voice,
> The region of Thy choice,

Where, undisturb'd by sin and earth, the soul
  Owns Thy entire control?—
'Tis on the mountain's summit dark and high,
  When storms are hurrying by;
'Tis 'mid the strong foundations of the earth,
  Where torrents have their birth.

No sounds of worldly toil ascending there,
  Mar the full burst of prayer;
Lone Nature feels that she may freely breathe,
  And round us and beneath
Are heard her sacred tones: the fitful sweep
  Of winds across the steep,
Through wither'd bents—romantic note and clear,
  Meet for a hermit's ear,—

The wheeling kite's wild solitary cry,
  And, scarcely heard so high,
The dashing waters when the air is still
  From many a torrent rill
That winds unseen beneath the shaggy fell,
  Track'd by the blue mist well;
Such sounds as make deep silence in the heart
  For Thought to do her part.[8]

For him each day marshals a triumphal pageant, from dawn, with its every dewy spark jewelling leaf and blossom, to the glory of the clouds about the setting sun. To a certain extent—though, in general, it must be confessed, he does violence to his own sweet nature in dogmatizing to the young—he even consents to view the flush of springtide, the garlands of May, through a child's eyes.[9]

Now and then, for moments, he actually seems, though in a hymnal, to forget hymnology, and to be unconscious of all but Nature's and Music's magic:

'Tis misty all, both sight and sound—
  I only know 'tis fair and sweet—
'Tis wandering on enchanted ground
  With dizzy brow and tottering feet.[10]

Almost it might be a bard of Love who sang, if he had ended there :

> Who ever saw the earliest rose
> First open her sweet breast ?
> Or, when the summer sun goes down,
> The first soft star in evening's crown
> Light up her gleaming crest ?
>
> But there 's a sweeter flower than e'er
> Blush'd on the rosy spray—
> A brighter star, a richer bloom
> Than e'er did western heaven illume
> At close of summer day.
>
> 'Tis Love, the last blest gift of Heaven ;
> Love, gentle, holy, pure ;
> But tenderer than a dove's soft eye,
> The searching sun, the open sky,
> She never could endure.[11]

Having said so much in Keble's favour, can I stop short of pronouncing him not only a writer of poetry, but a poet inspired ? I can, and must, though, in the opinion of many, I condemn myself as a critic. One quality of high poetry, though there are approaches towards it now and then, I do not discover in him ; and, unfortunately, it happens to be of the essence. The defect is not that he is facile and diffuse ; for that weakness he shares with some of the highest. It is not that his tendency, although he can be daintily simple, is to be artificial, ingenious, and elaborate. Greatness may be there too. The capital fault I find, sensible as I am of an apparent paradox, is that the piety, which is the one motive of his verse, is wanting in passion. Passion is a condition of all masterly achievement, probably in all literature, certainly in poetry. It burns beneath Dryden's Court politics, Swift's misanthropy, Burns's defiant humour, Byron's cynicism. Above

all, for religious verse, as Herbert's, Crashaw's, Vaughan's, Herrick's, it is the breath of life. In Keble's it is never more than an accident. He, the devoutest of men, the most emotional, the least worldly, a Nathaniel without guile, only by fits and starts blazes into flame from his own sovereign theme.

I feel him, while he diversifies and polishes his rhythm, drills his topics, verifies his allusions, corrects his punctuation, to be always on the watch against himself. He is guarding against explosions of enthusiasm, which would have swept away his excess of elaboration, and the prolixity fatal to many a fine thought. In modesty and shyness like to Herbert, Crashaw, Vaughan, he was, unlike them, not of those who invite or suffer the world to count their heart-beats. He has sung:

> And well it is for us our God should feel
> Alone our secret throbbings; so our prayer
> May readier spring to Heaven, nor spend its zeal
> On cloud-born idols of this lower air.[12]

The rule is true for worshippers; not for the poet who writes of them and himself. It is from those deep throbbings, secret except for verse, that essential poetry is distilled. Poetry demands the sacrifice of the privacy of souls. A poet, to aspire to the peaks, must be incapable of withholding the best and dearest in his nature. Keble, if so made as to have dared thus to suffer his spirit to take fire, at all events did not let it. Always he reserved something from the furnace. He constantly was pointing out how Christians, he with the rest, ought to think of Earth and Heaven, rather than how he himself in fact thought. Not having fastened his soul to the stake, he is not of the inner circle in poetry. Whether, had he submitted himself, he would have been, who can tell?

The Christian Year. Thoughts in Verse for the Sundays and Holidays throughout the Year. Forty-third ed. Oxford: John Henry Parker, 1853. Lyra Innocentium. Oxford: John Henry Parker, 1846. Miscellaneous Poems, by the Rev. John Keble. Oxford and London: James Parker & Co., 1869.

[1] Petition to the Lord of the Manor of Merdon of Anemone, Orchis, Violet, Daffodil, Cowslip, and Primula (Miscellaneous Poems).

[2] A Sister, and Fire (Lyra Innocentium, Children's Troubles).

[3] Monday before Easter, st. 8 (Christian Year).

[4] Easter Eve, st. 2 (ibid.).

[5] Morning, st. 1 (ibid.).

[6] First Sunday After Epiphany, st. 4 (ibid.).

[7] Fifteenth Sunday After Trinity, stanzas 1–2 (ibid.).

[8] Twentieth Sunday After Trinity, stanzas 1–3 (ibid.).

[9] May Garlands (Lyra Innocentium, Children's Sports).

[10] Fourth Sunday in Advent, st. 5 (Christian Year).

[11] Fourth Sunday in Lent, stanzas 2, 4, 5 (ibid.).

[12] Twenty-fourth Sunday After Trinity, st. 3. (ibid.).

JOHN HENRY NEWMAN

1801—1890

Oxford logic and metaphysics, and English Church lethargy cost literature a great poet, and gained for it a great poem. Dr. Newman's earlier productions showed more of promise than performance. The first in the collection of 1868 is separated from The Dream of Gerontius, dated January 1865, which closes the volume, by a space of forty years. Naturally the contents might be expected to differ widely in character. As naturally it might be supposed that the earlier would have more of fancy and enthusiasm. On the contrary, the writer is more self-restrained, less manifestly full of original ideas, at the commencement of his poetical career than at its end. While as yet uncertain of his theological position, doubting his old views, alarmed by the fascinations of the new, he curbed his imagination. When he had found peace at last, if not Nirvana, satisfaction at the sense of finality burst into an amazing, an amazed ecstasy, which transmuted a lake of fire into a bed of roses.

Not that the hundred and forty-three poems which precede the Dream are without distinct charms of their own. They are devout, with a modesty and good taste which hymnology often lacks. Frequently their spirit rises so high that the reader of them feels a shock when suddenly it seems to droop and sink. Their fault is a repression, rather than an incapability, of passionateness; a determination to make poetry a property of religion, and not religion subject-matter of poetry. Compare them with

the hymns in Milman's Martyr of Antioch or Siege of Jerusalem, and the contrast is violent. Poetry is a jealous mistress. Service it may lend; it will not endure to be treated as a handmaid. It insists upon choosing its times and seasons; upon enjoying whatever society it prefers. Self-abnegation, the bowing of its will to a predetermined object, are not among its virtues. On the requisition, even by a John Henry Newman, of sacrifices of its independence, it may continue the loan of form and rhythm; inspiration ceases. The poetic instinct was always in the man, ready to operate, if allowed its liberty. He on his part was as resolved to keep its action subservient to an obligation he regarded as sovereign. Treated as a drudge the Muse turns sullen and mute. Thus the reader may have prepared for a poem as well as hymn, when fancy is seen to withdraw abruptly from the brink of a noble lyric. How easily, for example, might The Scars of Sin, Desolation, For the Dead, have been caressed into music!

Sometimes a thought is so fine that it is hard to explain the general neglect; as in Transfiguration:

> I saw thee once, and nought discern'd
> For stranger to admire;
> A serious aspect, but it burn'd
> With no unearthly fire.
>
> Again I saw, and I confess'd
> Thy speech was rare and high;
> And yet it vex'd my burden'd breast,
> And scared, I knew not why.
>
> I saw once more, and awe-struck gazed
> On face, and form, and air;
> God's living glory round thee blazed—
> A Saint—a Saint was there![1]

I doubt if many even of Newman's admirers know of

his tender Birthday Offering on the grave of his young sister !

Loveliest, meekest, blithest, kindest !
Lead ! we seek the home thou findest !
Though thy name to us most dear,
Go ! we would not have thee here,
Lead, a guiding beacon bright
To travellers on the Eve of Light.
Welcome aye thy Star before us,
Bring it grief or gladness o'er us ;—
Keen regret and tearful yearning,
Whiles unfelt, and whiles returning :—
Or more gracious thoughts abiding,
Fever-quelling, sorrow-chiding :—
Or, when day-light blessings fail
Transport fresh as spice-fraught gale,
Sparks from thee which oft have lighted
Weary heart and hope benighted.
I this monument would raise,
Distant from the public gaze.
Few will see it ;—few e'er knew thee ;
But their beating hearts pursue thee,—
And their eyes fond thoughts betoken,
Though thy name be seldom spoken.
Pass on, stranger, and despise it !
These will read, and these will prize it.[2]

The merits of such charming things have, I can but suppose, been smothered under the neighbouring pile of verse pressed into service as a vehicle of religious musings, often momentous, yet not poetry. In other cases the infusion of militant dogma may have denied popular acceptance to pieces otherwise fully entitled to it. Mark, for example, the light touch in the Month of Mary :

The green green grass, the glittering grove,
The heaven's majestic dome,
They image forth a tenderer bower,
A more refulgent home ;

They tell us of that Paradise
Of everlasting rest,
And that high Tree, all flowers and fruit,
The sweetest, yet the best.

O Mary, pure and beautiful,
Thou art the Queen of May;
Our garlands wear about thy hair,
And they will ne'er decay.[3]

As bright, if more combative, is the Pilgrim Queen:

There sat a Lady all on the ground,
Rays of the morning circled her round.
Save thee and hail to thee, Gracious and Fair,
In the chill twilight what wouldst thou there?

'Here I sit desolate,' sweetly said she,
'Though I'm a queen, and my name is Marie;
Robbers have rifled my garden and store,
Foes they have stolen my heir from my bower.

They said they could keep Him far better than I,
In a palace all His, planted deep and raised high.
'Twas a palace of ice, hard and cold as were they,
And when summer came, it all melted away.

Next would they barter Him, Him the Supreme,
For the spice of the desert, and gold of the stream;
And me they bid wander in weeds and alone,
In this green merry land which once was my own.

A moment,' she said, 'and the dead shall revive;
The giants are failing, the Saints are alive;
I am coming to rescue my home and my reign,
And Peter and Philip are close in my train.'[4]

And he had indicated a gift for loftier strains, still controversial; for instance, in Refrigerium:

They are at rest;
The fire has eaten out all blot and stain,
And, convalescent, they enjoy a blest
Refreshment after pain;
Thus, to the End, in Eden's grots they lie,
And hear the fourfold river, as it hurries by.

They hear it sweep
In distance down the dark and savage glen;
Safe from its rocky bed, and current deep,
And eddying pools, till then;
They hear, and meekly muse, as fain to know
How long untired, unspent, that giant stream shall flow.

And soothing sounds
Blend with the neighbouring waters as they glide;
Posted along the haunted garden's bounds
Angelic forms abide,
Echoing, as words of watch, o'er lawn and grove,
The verses of that hymn which Seraphs chant above.[5]

Yet again; and there is the immortal Pillar of the Cloud—better known by its first three words—with which he might have been thought to reach his high-water mark as a poet. In hymnology, indeed, he never exceeded that sweet sad cry from heart to hearts for light to lead amid the gloom; for, as a hymn, it is unsurpassable. From the first line to the last, when

the night is gone;
And with the morn those angel faces smile
Which I have loved long since, and lost awhile—[6]

it might, unless for what was to follow, have been held to be as poetically lovely as verse can be without ceasing to be prayer.

But thirty years later he accomplished results in poetry which the Pillar of the Cloud itself cannot pretend to rival. Consider the absorption of passion into piety, the extortion of the consent of an intellect as searching as Voltaire's to an abjuration of all spiritual freedom, the renunciation of joy, pity, beauty. Watch the erection, on foundations thus remorselessly laid, of a pile of sublimest fancy. Then say how, when, and where literature has on like lines ever matched the Dream of Gerontius! In it Newman conjures

more deftly with the reason of his readers than the most dexterous Indian wonder-worker with the eyes of spectators. He arranges more dazzling combinations than the most ingenious pyrotechnist. He is a magician in his manipulation of thought and feeling. He makes us accept for natural what is most unreal, for fair what is ugly, for beneficent what is barbarous, for celestial what is earthy.

I can recall nothing in English literature to equal the dialectic skill with which probability, intelligibility, are breathed into the dying Saint's horror at the death he might be expected to welcome—horror lest the vice-laden body should sweep with itself the soul, though now purified, down the gulf of null chaos :

> 'Tis Death—O loving friends, your prayers!—'tis he!
> As though my very being had given way,
> As though I was no more a substance now,
> And could fall back on nought to be my stay,—
> Help, loving Lord! Thou my sole Refuge, Thou—
> And turn no whither, but must needs decay
> And drop from out the universal frame
> Into that shapeless, scopeless, blank abyss,
> That utter nothingness, of which I came.
>
> Sanctus fortis, Sanctus Deus,
> De profundis oro te,
> Miserere, Judex meus,
> Mortis in discrimine.[7]

Speeding to the Judgement in the arms of his Guardian Angel, his Soul, but half disembodied, is conscious that it remains liable, though itself sinless now, for its mated Body's old impurities; that it cannot enter into the communion, for which it longs, with the perfection of God made Man, until the gross shadow upon it of its guilty flesh be purged away. But fear has ceased, and weariness, and pain :

I went to sleep; and now I am refresh'd,
A strange refreshment: for I feel in me
An inexpressive lightness, and a sense
Of freedom, as I were at length myself,
And ne'er had been before. How still it is!
Am I alive or dead? I am not dead,
But in the body still; for I possess
A sort of confidence, which clings to me,
That each particular organ holds its place
As heretofore, combining with the rest
Into one symmetry, that wraps me round,
And makes me man; and surely I could move,
Did I but will it, every part of me.
Or I or it is rushing on the wings
Of light or lightning on an onward course,
And we e'en now are million miles apart.
Yet—is this peremptory severance
Wrought out in lengthening measurements of space,
Which grow and multiply by speed and time?
Or am I traversing infinity
By endless subdivision, hurrying back
From finite towards infinitesimal,
Thus dying out of the expanded world? [8]

Throughout his journeying he hears voices; his convoying angel's:

Oh, what a heart-subduing melody!

Then, the sullen howl of demons outside the Judgement Court, swarming,

Hungry and wild, to claim their property,
And gather souls for hell;

and, again, the song of

tender beings angelical,
Least and most childlike of the sons of God;
like the rushing of the wind—
The summer wind—among the lofty pines;
Swelling and dying, echoing round about,
Now here, now distant, wild and beautiful;
While, scatter'd from the branches it has stirr'd,
Descend ecstatic odours;

with, all the time, but thin and low, and fainter and more faint :

> the voice of friends around the bed,
> Who say the 'Subvenite' with the priest.[9]

Absolute rest, delight, emancipation ; yet the whole thrilled with a longing for agony of pain ; to be fitted by fire to abide hereafter in the Divine Presence—if but,

> ere I plunged amid the avenging flame,
> I had one sight of Him to strengthen me.

And in a moment, and for a moment, his wish granted —at the cost of lying before the Throne, scorched and shrivelled by

> the keen sanctity,
> Which, with its effluence, like a glory, clothes
> And circles round the Crucified ![10]

It is a gain of measureless content, so only that his ordeal be completed, as he prays, to the full :

> Take me away, and in the lowest deep
> There let me be,
> And there in hope the lone night-watches keep,
> Told out for me.
> There, motionless and happy in my pain,
> Lone, not forlorn,—
> There will I sing my sad perpetual strain,
> Until the morn.
> There will I sing, and soothe my stricken breast,
> Which ne'er can cease
> To throb, and pine, and languish, till possest
> Of its Sole Peace.
> There will I sing my absent Lord and Love :—
> Take me away,
> That sooner I may rise, and go above,
> And see Him in the truth of everlasting day.[11]

The whole high, strange argument, for its metaphysical

dexterity and depth, is worthy of Lucretius holding a very different brief. But, most of all, let us be grateful for a grand dithyramb, worthy also of the great Roman, which authorizes an inscription on the roll of British poets of the illustrious name of John Henry Newman, as much to their honour in the companionship as to his !

Verses on Various Occasions (J. H. N.). London: Burns, Oates & Co., 1868.

[1] Transfiguration, No. 51.
[2] Epiphany Eve: A Birthday Offering, No. 14
[3] The Month of Mary, No. 150.
[4] The Pilgrim Queen, No. 149.
[5] Refrigerium, No. 111.
[6] The Pillar of the Cloud (Lead, Kindly Light), No. 81, June 16, 1833
[7] The Dream of Gerontius, January 1865, No. 166.
[8] Ibid.
[9] Ibid.
[10] Ibid
[11] Ibid.

THOMAS HOOD

1799—1845

One of the uncrowned kings; the Heir bred, like Victor Hugo's L'Homme qui Rit, to suppose that he was a clown! If only he had known that his work in life was pure poetry—that he was a poet born! Till he died he never took rank as a poet. Scarcely would he have recognized himself as one. Although throughout his life he wrote poems, most of them received with favour, some with applause, they came as separate phenomena. His profession continued to be that of wit and humorist. The productions themselves, many as they were, did not muster together, and acclaim him for their chief and captain. Not until he had passed away, after a life of grinding care and poverty, were his graver poems, which in general reflect his adversities in their gloom, given to the world in a collected form. The utmost their editor hoped for them then was, that 'in any future recital of the names of writers who have contributed to the Stock of genuine English poetry, Thomas Hood might find honourable mention'.

The commendation is altogether too apologetic. It is pitched in a key far too low to satisfy Hood's sincere admirers. Poets and poems are divisible into two primary classes. There are those that the kingdom of poetry, though it is willing to admit them, could do without, and those that it could not. Whatever Hood's particular rank in the indispensable order, it is to this that he belongs. As I glance over the two volumes which comprise the body of his verse, serious and humorous, I am constantly lighting

upon pieces which it would be impossible to omit without the creation of a painful, visible gap in literature.

The Song of the Shirt is in possession of a niche which could not otherwise be filled :

'Oh ! but to breathe the breath
Of the cowslip and primrose sweet—
With the sky above my head,
And the grass beneath my feet.
For only one short hour
To feel as I used to feel,
Before I knew the woes of want
And the walk that costs a meal !

Oh ! but for one short hour !
A respite however brief !
No blessed leisure for Love or Hope,
But only time for Grief !
A little weeping would ease my heart,
But in their briny bed
My tears must stop, for every drop
Hinders needle and thread ! ' [1]

A second would stand painfully empty without, to occupy it, the Dream of Eugene Aram ;—the whole, down to the abrupt shuddering close :

That very night, while gentle sleep
The urchin eye-lids kiss'd,
Two stern-faced men set out from Lynn,
Through the cold and heavy mist ;
And Eugene Aram walk'd between,
With gyves upon his wrist.[2]

Yet another place he has permanently appropriated by his haunting Haunted House—murder-haunted—with its rusty stains,

Obscurely spotted to the door, and thence
With mazy doubles to the grated casement—
Oh what a tale they told of fear intense,
Of horror and amazement !

What human creature in the dead of night
Had coursed like hunted hare that cruel distance?
Had sought the door, the window, in his flight,
Striving for dear existence?[3]

I do not claim on his behalf a monopoly of capacity for measuring against one another the powers of Earth and Hell; but I know of none but Burns who equals him in the reconciliation, for the purpose, of the tragic and the comic. Mark the trooping of monsters to avenge the attack of the Brocken forgemen upon Hell's lord:

Awful coveys of terrible things,
With forked tongues and venomous stings,
On hagweed, broomsticks, and leathern wings,
  Are hovering round the Hut!
Shapes, that within the focus bright
  Of the Forge, are like shadows and blots;
But, farther off, in the shades of night,
Clothed with their own phosphoric light,
  Are seen in the darkest spots.
Sounds! that fill the air with noises,
Strange and indescribable voices,
From Hags, in a diabolical clatter—
Cats that spit curses, and apes that chatter
Scraps of cabalistical matter—
  Owls that screech, and dogs that yell—
Skeleton hounds that will never be fatter—
  All the domestic tribes of Hell,
Shrieking for flesh to tear and tatter,
    Bones to shatter,
    And limbs to scatter,
And who it is that must furnish the latter
  Those blue-looking men know well![4]

As I know of few things in poetry more grotesquely terrible than the burning of Satan to a cinder, so I feel the singularity of Hood's gift for eliciting the poetry of everyday life. How dainty is the pathos employed on a common death-bed!

We watch'd her breathing thro' the night,
  Her breathing soft and low,
As in her breast the wave of life
  Kept heaving to and fro.

So silently we seem'd to speak,
  So slowly moved about,
As we had lent her half our powers
  To eke her living out.

Our very hopes belied our fears,
  Our fears our hopes belied—
We thought her dying when she slept,
  And sleeping when she died.

For when the morn came dim and sad,
  And chill with early showers,
Her quiet eyelids closed—she had
  Another morn than ours.[5]

Perfect every line. We owe more gratitude for this investiture of simple death—such as it is not beyond the least of us to aspire to—with a quiet beauty, than for dithyrambs over a Conqueror's bier. That indeed is among Hood's merits, which he shares with the princes of song, that, though he can rise to the heights, he sees the beauty of plain things. A child's embrace of its mother is as ordinary as dying; and see how much it too suggests to him!

Love thy mother, little one!
Kiss and clasp her neck again;—
Hereafter she may have a son
Will kiss and clasp her neck in vain.
  Love thy mother, little one!

Gaze upon her living eyes,
And mirror back her love for thee;—
Hereafter thou may'st shudder sighs
To meet them when they cannot see.
  Gaze upon her living eyes!

Press her lips the while they glow
With love that they have often told ;—
Hereafter thou mayst press in woe,
And kiss them till thine own are cold.
Press her lips the while they glow ! [6]

Really there is nothing, it might be thought, in his recollections of his boyhood, with which it was worth troubling the world ; perhaps, even himself ; and yet the sweetness for us all !

I remember, I remember,
The house where I was born,
The little window where the sun
Came peeping in at morn ;
He never came a wink too soon,
Nor brought too long a day,
But now, I often wish the night
Had borne my breath away !

I remember, I remember,
The roses, red and white,
The violets, and the lily-cups,
Those flowers made of light !
The lilacs where the robin built,
And where my brother set
The laburnum on his birthday,—
The tree is living yet !

I remember, I remember,
Where I was used to swing,
And thought the air must rush as fresh
To swallows on the wing ;
My spirit flew in feathers then,
That is so heavy now,
And summer pools could hardly cool
The fever on my brow !

I remember, I remember,
The fir-trees dark and nigh ;
I used to think their slender tops
Were close against the sky ;

It was a childish ignorance,
But now 'tis little joy
To know I'm farther off from heav'n
Than when I was a boy.[7]

Already I have instanced enough admirable verse to make a reputation; and how much I have omitted! But, at all events, I must not pass by Ruth, as she stands

breast high amid the corn,
Clasp'd by the golden light of morn,
Like the sweetheart of the sun,
Who many a glowing kiss had won;[8]

or fair Ines, who has

gone into the West,
To dazzle when the sun is down,
And rob the world of rest;
She took our daylight with her,
The smiles that we love best,
With morning blushes on her cheek
And pearls upon her breast;[9]

or the all-sufficient love-song:

I love thee—I love thee!
'Tis all that I can say:—
It is my vision in the night,
My dreaming in the day:
The very echo of my heart,
The blessing when I pray:
I love thee—I love thee!
Is all that I can say.[10]

Everywhere still, throughout the two sister volumes, the reader is sure to come upon lines, phrases, which will not consent to be forgotten. Even in that ugliest of poems with greatness in them, The Last Man, which fascinates without delighting, there is a redeeming spark of pathos—the confession of loneliness by the survivor of human kind,

a hangman, who, to be sole heir of the earth, had just strung up his solitary companion, a beggar man :

> If the veriest cur would lick my hand,
> I could love it like a child ! [11]

So, again, the humour of the tale of Miss Kilmansegg leaves space for a grim individual pitifulness :

> Gold, still gold ! hard, yellow, and cold—
> For gold she had lived, and she died for gold ! [12]

At any instant a figure suddenly will start forth, with an appeal to the heart, at once entirely natural and entirely original ; the outcast, on the river bank, in glaring London, with its clothed, fed, and sheltered millions, as

> She stood, ' with amazement ',
> Houseless by night ; [13]

the swarm waiting for the Casual Ward to open ; sempstress, artisan, whole families ;

> Father, mother, and ' careful child ',
> Looking as if it had never smiled ; [14]

Lycus, the centaur that had been man, when the unsuspecting boy insults his shame at his bestial shape with a handful of grass, and, in anger at its rejection, pelts him with stones :

> I felt not, whose fate
> Was to meet more distress in his love than his hate ; [15]

the fisherman in his storm-tost boat on the lee-shore :

> Oh, God ! to think Man ever
> Comes too near his Home ! [16]

and the hard-tried poet himself, with his birthday wish for his daughter, of

> all the bliss that life endears,
> Not without smiles, ' nor yet from tears '
> Too strictly kept. [17]

None has ever more entirely possessed the secret of sudden ascents; sudden heart-kindlings. In some sort all the Serious Poems are examples; but we never can tell when Hood may not move to tears in a piece where the moment before he had been jesting:

> There is no music in the life
> That sounds with idiot laughter solely;
> There 's not a string attuned to mirth,
> But has its chord in Melancholy.[18]

Doubtless, in compensation, after the manner of poets, with rare exceptions, such as Keats and Gray, he sinks now and again; is eccentric without being original, tedious without being solemn. He can wear a sentiment threadbare, as in The Lady's Dream, and The Lay of the Labourer. His endless fancies can cloy, though in such a garden of dainty devices as The Plea of the Midsummer Fairies. He can be, though very seldom, merely dull, as in The Two Peacocks of Bedfont. He can smother Hellenic roses, as in Hero and Leander, in a thicket, however fragrant, of mediaeval embellishments. He can call a pamphlet an Ode, as his epistle to Rae Wilson, and spoil a charming sonnet with a poor pun. But measure the good against the ill; and the failures are nowhere. As a boy I heard nothing of Hood as a poet, much of him as a humorist. The Song of the Shirt surprised my little world without persuading it that it had to worship a poet the more. During my undergraduate days I first learnt to appreciate his poetry; and I have read and admired it ever since. Not the less, when recently I surveyed it as a whole, I stood amazed. The melody, the tenderness, and sympathy, the fancy, I find inexhaustible. Above all, is the unexpectedness. When I have believed I had explored all the singer's

resources, he has touched a fresh cell in brain or heart, and music, echoing from the far distance, has set it thrilling.

I can conjecture no explanation of Hood's absence from the first class of British poetry, unless that he himself never clearly made up his mind to demand entrance. He preferred to hover outside, and sing as he listed. I do not dare to pretend to overrule his choice for himself, accepted, as apparently it has been, by the common arbiters of public opinion. In any case, whatever the view of his own place, it is impossible to question the rank of a numerous chorus of bright creatures of his imagination.

Poems (Serious), by Thomas Hood. Fourth edition. E. Moxon, 1851. Poems of Wit and Humour, by Thomas Hood. Fifth edition. E. Moxon, 1853.

[1] The Song of the Shirt (Serious Poems), stanzas 9–10.

[2] The Dream of Eugene Aram, st. 36 (ibid.).

[3] The Haunted House, Part III, stanzas 27–8 (ibid.).

[4] The Forge: A Romance of the Iron Age, Part II, stanzas 12–13 (Poems of Wit and Humour).

[5] The Death-bed (Serious Poems).

[6] To a Child, Embracing His Mother, stanzas 1–3 (ibid.).

[7] I Remember, I Remember (ibid.).

[8] Ruth, st. 1 (ibid.). [9] Fair Ines, st. 1 (ibid.).

[10] To ——, st. 1 (ibid.).

[11] The Last Man, st. 35 (Poems of Wit and Humour).

[12] Miss Kilmansegg and Her Precious Leg—Her Death, st. 16 (Serious Poems).

[13] The Bridge of Sighs, st. 11 (ibid.).

[14] The Workhouse Clock: An Allegory (ibid.).

[15] Lycus the Centaur (ibid.).

[16] The Lee-shore, st. 6 (ibid.).

[17] To my Daughter on her Birthday, st. 3 (ibid.).

[18] Ode to Melancholy (ibid.).

ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING

1806—1861

Of the kind the foremost writer of English poetry—but a poetess. Or shall I, changing one word, say—and a poetess? For, with beauty everywhere, and womanliness as ubiquitous, I do not presume to decide on the independence one of the other. Women-writers now and then, like George Sand and George Eliot, if not Currer Bell, have dissembled their sex. Either they have disdained allowances for it; or they have distrusted the superiority of the other to prejudice. Mrs. Browning had none of that affectation, or apprehension. On the contrary, she may be said to have gloried in being a woman.

In any case her verse would have proclaimed the fact. None but a woman—or perhaps a woman immured for a large part of her life in two rooms—could have imagined the repulse of a lover beloved, as in Insufficiency,[1] and the martyr's cry of Denial!—

> I love thee not, I dare not love thee! go
> In silence; drop my hand.
> If thou seek roses, seek them where they blow
> In garden-alleys, not in desert sand.
> Can life and death agree,
> That thou shouldst stoop thy song to my complaint?
> I cannot love thee. If the word is faint,
> Look in my face and see.[2]

The splendid unreason of Duchess May, the self-devotion to death of the Crusader's bride-page, and the sweet absurdities, not to be read by any male person without a blush, of

Lady Geraldine, are all feminine. So is the conflict, with its result, between the egotism of Isobel's maternal love, and her sick child's craving for his home with the Angels. The grief of the dead blind boy's mother, that she can be no more his sun and moon, and his slave, betrays the same authorship. Pathos, a common gift of poets, is for her steeped in her femininity. Into the dumb affection of her dog this reads the instinct, the impulse, to share his mistress's distress, without requiring to comprehend or justify it :

> And if one or two quick tears
> Dropped upon his glossy ears,
> Or a sigh came double,
> Up he sprang in eager haste,
> Fawning, fondling, breathing fast,
> In a tender trouble.[3]

In Wine of Cyprus, noblest, to me, of all her verse, I feel it equally in the affectionate endeavour to balance, as it were, by her own wasting sickness the earlier and different calamity of her aged tutor in Greek. Fondly, as she thanks him for his gift of Hellenic wine, she recalls their studies together in Attic tragedy :

> And I think of those long mornings
> Which my thought goes far to seek,
> When, betwixt the folio's turnings,
> Solemn flowed the rhythmic Greek :
> Past the pane the mountain spreading,
> Swept the sheep's bell's tinkling noise,
> While a girlish voice was reading,
> Somewhat low for ais and ois.
>
> Then, what golden hours were for us !
> While we sate together there,
> How the white vests of the chorus
> Seemed to wave up a live air !

How the cothurns trod majestic
  Down the deep iambic lines,
And the rolling anapaestic
  Curled like vapour over shrines!

Oh, our Aeschylus, the thunderous,
  How he drove the bolted breath
Through the cloud, to wedge it ponderous
  In the gnarlèd oak beneath!
Oh, our Sophocles, the royal,
  Who was born to monarch's place,
And who made the whole world loyal,
  Less by kingly power than grace!

Our Euripides, the human,
  With his droppings of warm tears,
And his touches of things common,
  Till they rose to touch the spheres!
Our Theocritus, our Bion,
  And our Pindar's shining goals!—
These were cup-bearers undying,
  Of the wine that 's meant for souls.

And my Plato, the divine one,
  If men know the gods aright
By their motions as they shine on
  With a glorious trail of light!
And your noble Christian bishops,
  Who mouthed grandly the last Greek!
Though the sponges on their hyssops
  Were distent with wine—too weak.

For the rest—a mystic moaning
  Kept Cassandra at the gate,
With wild eyes the vision shone in,
  And wide nostrils scenting fate.
And Prometheus, bound in passion
  By brute Force to the blind stone,
Showed us looks of invocation
  Turned to ocean and the sun.

And Medea we saw burning
At her nature's planted stake;
And proud Oedipus fate-scorning
While the cloud came on to break—
While the cloud came on slow, slower,
Till he stood discrowned, resigned!—
But the reader's voice dropped lower
When the poet called him Blind.—

And now—teacher and pupil, were they not equals in fate? Alas!

For me, I am not worthy
After gods and Greeks to drink,
And my lips are pale and earthy
To go bathing from this brink:
Since you heard them speak the last time,
They have faded from their blooms,
And the laughter of my pastime
Has learnt silence at the tombs.[4]

On account of sex—in spite of it—without relation to it—whichever you will—her work captivates. Its defects are many. The exuberance of words is exasperating. The Lost Bower, for example, delights for a dozen stanzas, and distresses long before the seventy-fourth. The habit of hunting for an occasion of tenderness everywhere is apt to degenerate into spurious sentimentality. The Poet's Vow, and A Child Asleep are flagrant offenders. Poetry has no more business with specific 'poetic' feeling than with 'poetic' diction. A dearth of common sense, and of what I am afraid I must call manliness, is uncomfortably discernible. But the want is compensated by a feminine insight as subtle as it is affectionate. We feel this inspiring the angelic fancy of a nightingale in Paradise pursuing the human exiles thence with a regretful adieu:

I am the nearest nightingale
That singeth in Eden after you;

And I am singing loud and true,
And sweet,—I do not fail.
I sit upon a cypress bough
Close to the gate, and I fling my song
Over the gate and through the mail
Of the warden angels marshalled strong,—
  Over the gate and after you!
And the warden angels let it pass,
Because the poor brown bird, alas,
  Sings in the garden, sweet and true.
And I built my song of high pure notes,
  Note after note, height over height,
  Till I strike the arch of the Infinite,
And I bridge abysmal agonies
With strong, clear calms of harmonies,—
And something abides, and something floats,
In the song which I sing after you.
  Fare ye well, farewell! [5]

It supplies ethereal tints to a Portrait:

I will paint her as I see her,
  Ten times have the lilies blown,
  Since she looked upon the sun.

And her face is lily-clear,
  Lily-shaped, and dropped in duty
  To the law of its own beauty.

Oval cheeks encoloured faintly,
  Which a trail of golden hair
  Keeps from fading off to air;

And a forehead fair and saintly,
  Which two blue eyes undershine,
  Like meek prayers before a shrine.

Face and figure of a child,—
  Thought too calm, you think, and tender,
  For the childhood you would lend her.

Yet, child-simple, undefiled,
  Frank, obedient, waiting still
  On the turnings of your will.

And if any poet knew her,
He would sing of her with falls
Used in lovely madrigals.

And if any painter drew her,
He would paint her unaware
With a halo round the hair.[6]

It gathers, flowering from the grave of Cowper, a recantation of his despair :

Like a sick child that knoweth not his mother while she blesses
And drops upon his burning brow the coolness of her kisses,—
That turns his fevered eyes around—'My mother! where's my mother!'—
As if such tender words and deeds could come from any other!—

The fever gone, with leaps of heart he sees her bending o'er him,
Her face all pale from watchful love, the unweary love she bore him!—
Thus woke the poet from the dream his life's long fever gave him,
Beneath those deep pathetic Eyes which closed in death to save him.[7]

Happily the light of the tomb was not needed to reveal to herself that joy may be neighbour to affliction :

I thought once how Theocritus had sung
Of the sweet years, the dear and wished-for years,
Who each one in a gracious hand appears
To bear a gift for mortals, old or young :
And as I mused it in his antique tongue,
I saw in gradual vision through my tears,
The sweet sad years, the melancholy years,
Those of my own life, who by turns had flung
A shadow across me. Straightway I was 'ware,
So weeping, how a mystic Shape did move
Behind me, and drew me backward by the hair :
And a voice said in mastery, while I strove,—
'Guess now who holds thee?' 'Death,' I said, But, there,
The silver answer rang,—'Not Death, but Love.'[8]

If she ever wearied of life, it was rest to the body that she craved, not to the soul :

Friends, dear friends, when it shall be
That this low breath is gone from me,
And round my bier ye come to weep,
Let One, most loving of you all,
Say, 'Not a tear must o'er her fall!
"He giveth His belovëd, sleep!"' [9]

Not, after all, that repose and acquiescence of any sort were the qualities of her predilection. On the contrary, her favourite mental attitude is one of something she feigns to be rebellious wrath. She is incensed with her fatherland for its treatment of the Captive Napoleon, who,

trusting to his noblest foes,
When earth was all too grey for chivalry,
Died of their mercies 'mid the desert sea; [10]

with the world for its acceptance of the phrase, 'Loved Once,' as if it were possible to have loved, and cease to love:

Love strikes but one hour—Love! Those never loved
Who dream that they loved Once; [11]

with the mad folly, as well as guilt, of sinners of her own sex, in expecting from their partners in evil—commonly tempters—the least fidelity to the love they have tainted. 'Go!' she cries to the poor wretch she is confessing:

'Thou hast chosen the Human, and left the Divine!
Then, at least, have the Human shared with thee their wild berry-wine?
Have they loved back thy love, and when strangers approached thee with blame,
Have they covered thy fault with their kisses, and loved thee the same?'
But she shrunk and said,
'God, over my head,
Must sweep in the wrath of His judgement-seas,
If He shall deal with me sinning, but only indeed the same
And no gentler than these.' [12]

Poetry would not be the admirable thing it is, were it not in its essence different from all else. Masters of the art, in general, while recognizing this, mix, like Assayers of the Mint, a goodly proportion of rougher and more ordinary metal with their poetic bullion. A minority, like Shelley and Keats, compact their edifices out of sunbeams, and rainbows, and driving mists. Mrs. Browning also, in the fabrics she builds, trusts to fancy. If the impression her heroes and heroines produce is often repellent, it is that she has endeavoured to lodge beings of flesh and blood in her very unsubstantial structures. Shelley and Keats created inhabitants to occupy, without overweighting, the tenements. Should an explanation of that radical error which led to her failures as contrasted with their successes be required, I am compelled to seek it in the simple facts that she was a woman, and a recluse who had spent most of her life in the clouds. She imagined that she could settle her corporeal creatures on them as conveniently. In Aurora Leigh, which has always, I confess, left a bitter taste on my mental palate, all her literary idiosyncrasies are accumulated and exaggerated. The circumstances, there especially, were too many, too modern, and too actual. But even when elsewhere she indulges in analogous, though less trying, experiments, the effect is to me similarly unpleasant.

Fortunately her characters and incidents frequently are fitted to the habitations she has provided for them. The effect then is delightful. In its highest form her verse positively sings. How it lifts the heart in Wine of Cyprus, rocks to rest in Sleep and Cowper's Grave, sets on fire in Confessions, gathers a whole nosegay of love in Sonnets from the Portuguese, illuminates Parnassus in A Vision of Poets, and heralded a risen Italy while Austria seemed to be

sealing her tomb! An aerial concert; and not the less fascinating for readers with a taste for strains purely spiritual that they are as little bound to satisfy the popular male ear as when, an undergraduate of Oxford, I heard one destined to rule it rouse the Union to frantic applause by jeering at the loveliest of the lovely whole.

Poems by Elizabeth Barrett Browning. Three vols. Chapman and Hall, 1864.

[1] Insufficiency. [2] A Denial, st. 2.
[3] To Flush, my Dog, st. 2.
[4] Wine of Cyprus, stanzas 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 4.
[5] A Drama of Exile.
[6] A Portrait, stanzas 1–6 and 13–14.
[7] Cowper's Grave, stanzas 9–10.
[8] Sonnets from the Portuguese, Sonnet i.
[9] The Sleep, st. 9.
[10] Crowned and Buried, st. 13.
[11] Loved Once, st. 8.
[12] Confessions, st. 9.

CHARLES KINGSLEY

1819—1875

ANOTHER example, among many, of the conflict for existence of faculties fitted for analogous pursuits. Nature equipped Charles Kingsley with the raw material, in varying proportions, of the forces which make a poet, a novelist, a social reformer, a student of science, a theologian, a historian. From the first they competed for possession of him. With the powerful aid of youth poetry seized on the leadership. Later on, with its own consent, monarchy was abolished. A commonwealth, in which each did what seemed good in its own eyes, took its place. The man being such as he was, and his poetical gift what it was, I do not suppose that literature, even poetry itself, has lost greatly by the revolution. His character was that of a combatant. He had a certain number of songs in him to sing; so many arrows of verse in his quiver. Forth he shot, hitting the mark now and again. When the archer found his quiver empty, he drew sword or dagger—romance, essay, lecture, sermon—and battled as manfully as ever. I see no ground for belief that, like some, he ceased versifying by compulsion of a more masterful passion of his soul, or out of indolence, satiety, or incapacity, mental or moral. Simply the one special weapon had done its work; and he exchanged it for another. I am grateful in the circumstances for the fact. He does not call up in me an idea of incalculable possibilities of poetical inspiration. It is well that he should not have deluded himself into imagining descents of the spirit when there were none.

The outset of his poetical career was at once disappointing and promising. His Saint's Tragedy is strong in the wrong places. I myself am sensible of anger rather than sympathy. I keep wondering how much more of passionate reasonableness Robert Browning, for instance, might not have instilled into the hapless slave of her own and her teacher's fanaticism. It is a failure, if a brilliant one. Such too, I must, on the same ground of a neglect of proportion, judge Andromeda to be. The picture of the girl, when her mother leaves her on the rock—as no mother conceivably could have left a child—makes the heart ache, as the poet intended it should :

Watching the pulse of the oars die down, as her own died with them,
Tearless, dumb with amaze she stood, . . .
helpless and hopeless,
Wide-eyed, downward gazing in vain at the black blank darkness.[1]

But she almost disappears in an assemblage of fine scenes described in rolling, musical hexameters. The background is too engrossing for the action and the characters. The accessories, dawn-lit highlands, gambolling sea-nymphs, the charms of the golden-haired, ivory-limbed Deliverer, Athene's gracious wisdom, are fully and melodiously set forth; only the fateful combat itself, with the rescue, is dismissed in three casual lines. As an osprey on a dolphin :

Thus fell the boy on the beast; thus rolled up the beast in his horror,
Once, as the dead eyes glared into his; then his sides, death-sharpened,
Stiffened and stood, brown rock, in the wash of the wandering water.[2]

Neither of the two works was the fruit of raw youth. They are their author's only poems of length; and neither has life in it. At the same time each has abundance of thought and fancy; and each gives token of something better.

In due time the promise was fulfilled by a succession of short poems; many of them superior to the longer. They are superior, in that, while being things of beauty, as those were, if inanimate, things of beauty, these are of a beauty which breathes and moves. Thus in Margaret's cry to Dolcino, we seem to feel the pulsation of mingled pride and suffering:

> Ask if I love thee? Oh, smiles cannot tell
> Plainer what tears are now showing too well.
> Had I not loved thee, my sky had been clear;
> Had I not loved thee, I had not been here,
> Weeping by thee.
>
> Ask if I love thee? How else could I borrow
> Pride from man's slander, and strength from my sorrow?
> Laugh when they sneer at the fanatic's bride,
> Knowing no bliss, save to toil and abide
> Weeping by thee![3]

A living well, if of bitterness, overflows in the complaint of the Ugly Princess:

> My parents bow, and lead them forth,
> For all the crowd to see—
> Ah well! the people might not care
> To cheer a dwarf like me.
>
> They little know how I could love,
> How I could plan and toil,
> To swell those drudges' scanty gains,
> Their mites of rye and oil.
>
> They little know what dreams have been
> My playmates, night and day;
> Of equal kindness, helpful care,
> A mother's perfect sway.
>
> Now earth to earth in convent walls,
> To earth in churchyard sod;
> I was not good enough for man,
> And so am given to God.[4]

Kingsley's readers are never without a consciousness of a call to arms; of the stir of a stormy emotion which has set imagination at work. It vibrates in the Outlaw's defiance of laws forbidding him to

hunt God's cattle upon God's ain hills;

in his contempt for the certainty of a noose in the end; and in his prayer to his mother to steal his body from the gibbet:

And when I am taen and hangit, mither, a brittling o' my deer,
Ye'll no leave your bairn to the corbie craws, to dangle in the air;
But ye'll send up my twa douce brethren, and ye'll steal me frae the tree,
And bury me up on the brown brown muirs, where I aye looed to be.[5]

It inspired A Christmas Carol, with its gleams and shadows alike:

I went sighing past the Church across the moorland dreary—
'Oh! never sin and want and woe this earth will leave,
And the bells but mock the wailing round, they sing so cheery.'
Then arose a joyous clamour from the wild fowl on the mere,
Beneath the stars, across the snow, like clear bells ringing,
And a voice within cried—'Listen! Christmas carols even here!
Though thou be dumb, yet o'er their work the stars and snows are singing.'[6]

Even the despair of Airly Beacon has a fresh movement as of hill-top air about it:

Airly Beacon, Airly Beacon
Oh the pleasant sight to see
Shires and towns from Airly Beacon,
While my love climbed up to me!

Airly Beacon, Airly Beacon;
Oh the happy hours we lay
Deep in fern on Airly Beacon,
Courting through the summer's day!

Airly Beacon, Airly Beacon;
Oh the weary haunt for me,
All alone on Airly Beacon,
With his baby on my knee![7]

I must add, though of a gusty freedom too rebellious against law and order to be acknowledged later on by a Church dignitary, the tale of the Swan-neck's recognition —hopeless even for a mother—of the body of King Harold, stripped, and gashed, and featureless:

Up and spake the Swan-neck high,
'Go! to all your thanes let cry
How I loved him best of all,
I whom men his leman call;
Better knew his body fair
Than the mother which him bare.'

Rousing erne and sallow glede,
Rousing grey wolf off his feed,
Over franklin, earl, and thane,
Heaps of mother-naked slain,
Round the red field tracing slow,
Stooped that Swan-neck white as snow;
Never blushed nor turned away,
Till she found him where he lay;
Clipt him in her armés fair,
Wrapt him in her yellow hair,
Bore him from the battle-stead,
Saw him laid in pall of lead,
Took her to a minster high,
For Earl Harold's soul to cry.[8]

The merit itself of these pieces, and of others their equals, or all but equals, is of a kind to suggest that the writer had reached the limits of his powers. He might have been expected to produce more of corresponding, but scarcely higher, rank. A phenomenon, as in certain other poetical careers, is that from the same pen, within brief, if any positive, intervals, we find issuing three poems, ideal,

perfect. Except for the varieties of sadness, or suffering, they are wholly different; yet each is complete, consummate.

Read a hundred times The Sands of Dee; and there is never a sense of triteness. The whole is one long-drawn musical, not sob, but sigh:

'O Mary, go and call the cattle home,
And call the cattle home,
And call the cattle home
Across the Sands of Dee.'
The western wind was wild and dank with foam,
And all alone went she.

The western tide crept up along the sand,
And o'er and o'er the sand,
And round and round the sand,
As far as eye could see.
The rolling mist came down and hid the land;
And never home came she.

'Oh! is it weed, or fish, or floating hair—
A tress of golden hair,
A drownèd maiden's hair
Above the nets at sea?
Was never salmon yet that shone so fair
Among the stakes on Dee.'

They rowed her in across the rolling foam,
The cruel crawling foam,
The cruel hungry foam,
To her grave beside the sea;
But still the boatmen hear her call the cattle home
Across the Sands of Dee.[9]

I cannot pretend that the second, The Three Fishers, vies with that in absolute beauty. It does not carry about it the same atmosphere, the same sensation of undefined possibilities, the same absence of any intention in the poet to point a moral, to do more than tell a story.

The outlines are clear cut. The sorrowfulness itself is natural and limited. It is all in life's hard bargain :

> For men must work, and women must weep,
> And the sooner it 's over, the sooner to sleep;
> And good-bye to the bar and its moaning.[10]

But the prospect beyond—if hard that too and grey, what strangeness, what infinitude, in its ordinance of the acceptance by men of lines as they are laid for them ; of resignation to what might seem to be despair ; of tribulation's certainty of cessation—if not repose—in death ! The song moves within narrow bounds but beats them all ; and it looks out upon a wide landscape beyond. And the melody besides !

Then for Santa Maura ; the least popularly known of the trio ; and the loftiest. 'If my poetry lives', wrote Kingsley himself to his publisher, 'it will be by Santa Maura, and a song or two.' Spiritual chemistry has turned a woman's love, a woman's trust, into a service of angelic adoration, which offends neither as extravagant, nor as profane. We shall search in vain the Dictionary of Christian Biography for the agonies and heroism of this three-months' bride of the blinded, tortured evangelist. Only by the poet's fancy have they been witnessed ; and by that they are here faithfully recorded in letters of blood and fire. The beauteous victim had been tempted, and half consented, to buy at the cost of the acknowledgement of Diocletian's divinity, and a sprinkling of incense upon the Emperor's altar, freedom for her husband—freedom in unknown lands to preach and pray :

> 'Bend, save whole nations ! would not that atone
> For one short word ? '

He had scornfully thrown back in her face such life and liberty ; and remorsefully seeing her sin, she had bidden the Proconsul to do his worst.

Stripped and scourged, she ejaculates, in horror and shame at the recollection, to her husband :

> 'And yet no earthquake came to swallow me ;
> While all the court around, and walls, and roofs,
> And all the earth and air were full of eyes,
> Eyes, eyes, which scorched my limbs like burning flame,
> Until my brain seemed bursting from my brow ;
> And yet no earthquake came ! And then I knew
> This body was not yours alone, but God's—
> His loan—He needed it ; and after that
> The worst was come, and any torture more
> A change—a lightening—'

even crucifixion itself—for that was by her bridegroom's side :

> 'I crawled to you,
> And kissed your bleeding feet, and called aloud—
> You heard me ! You know all ! I am at peace.
> Peace, peace, as still and bright as is the moon
> Upon your limbs, came on me at your smile,
> And kept me happy, when they dragged me back
> From that last kiss, and spread me on the cross,
> And bound my wrists and ancles—Do not sigh ;
> I prayed, and bore it ; and since they raised me up,
> My eyes have never left your face, my own, my own,
> Nor will, till death comes ! '

Her one desire, her prayer to God, is, that strength may be spared the gibbeted preacher to cry from the very cross :

> 'Words which may wake the dead ! '

In ages to come, she predicts, they would know his worth :

> 'And crown him martyr ; and his name will ring
> Through all the shores of earth, and all the stars
> Whose eyes are sparkling through their tears to see
> His triumph—Preacher ! Martyr !—Ah—and me ?

If they must couple my poor name with his,
Let them tell all the truth—say how I loved him,
And tried to damn him by that love! Oh Lord!
Returning good for evil! and was this
The payment I deserved for such a sin?
To hang here on my cross, and look at him,
Until we kneel before Thy throne in heaven![11]

English poetry, from Chaucer to Tennyson, has been rich in examples of wifely, womanly patience, devotion, self-sacrifice. But, many and noble as they are, I think Santa Maura ought to rank among the best. I value the rhapsody not the less highly for the human element of hero-worship blended with the more purely celestial exaltation. I only hope that the austere preacher of the Gospel, even as imagined by Kingsley, merited it all.

I had thought, and have not dared, to set beside the Three the Ode, admirable in itself, to the North-East Wind. As simple singing, in its exultant, generous insolence, it deserves all honour;

What 's the soft South-Wester?
'Tis the ladies' breeze,
Bringing home their true-loves
Out of all the seas:
But the black North-Easter,
Through the snow-storm hurled,
Drives our English hearts of oak
Seaward round the world.

Come, as came our fathers,
Heralded by thee,
Conquering from the eastward,
Lords by land and sea.
Come; and strong within us
Stir the Vikings' blood;
Bracing brain and sinew;
Blow, thou wind of God![12]

I feel, however, a spiritual want in the brave, blustering breeze, which shuts against it the region of immortal grief or bliss, where those other strains are entitled to have their dwelling.

The Three are lovely conceptions ; and we should have to ransack a library of poetry before discovering superiors in their own class. I do not suppose, nevertheless, that greatness could justly be attributed to their writer as a poet. For that a man's best poetical work ought to suggest that it is supreme in quality because it flows from a fountain of inspiration in himself which is perennially full and deep. It is impossible to question Kingsley's inspiration any more than his genius. It is permissible to believe that he held it at the general service of the wide circle of his life's work. His romances, his histories and essays are coloured by it ; even his sermons ; and it elevates them all. Never was there a nature, an intelligence, more generously cultivated, more sympathetic, more pervious to all the informing influences, to the entire spirit, of its race, rank, and age, throughout which more constantly breathed an independent element, the poetic. But inspiration to constitute distinctively a poet, and not a mere occasional singer, insists upon exclusiveness in the vocation. It punishes disobedience by relegating the offender to a mixed grade ; and disobedience was thus punished here. Howbeit, of this at least I have no doubt—whatever Kingsley's personal status among poets—that, however jealous the principle on which a poetical anthology may be framed, verses of his are sure to be numbered in it.

Andromeda and Other Poems, by Charles Kingsley, Rector of Eversley. London : John W. Parker & Son, 1858. Also Collected Edition. Macmillan, 1872.

[1] Andromeda, vv. 106–11.

[2] Ibid., vv. 391–3.

[3] Margaret to Dolcino. [4] The Ugly Princess.
[5] The Outlaw, stanzas 7 and 10.
[6] A Christmas Carol, vv. 2–4, 9–12.
[7] Airly Beacon. [8] The Swan-neck, vv. 25–30, 35–48.
[9] The Sands of Dee. [10] The Three Fishers, vv. 19–21.
[11] Santa Maura, A. D. 304, vv. 58–9, 129–38, 194–204, 225, 232–42.
Life of Alexander Macmillan, by M. G. Graves, 1910.
[12] Ode to the North-East Wind, vv. 53–68.

RALPH WALDO EMERSON

1803—1882

EMERSON in the opinion of his own generation ranked next to Carlyle as a thinker. As a thinker he still is held, and justly, to be profound. The larger part in bulk of his literary life was devoted to the composition of essays and lectures. To a great number even of his admirers he is unknown as a poet. Yet I should be much surprised to learn that he did not value himself as a poet chiefly. If so, fallible as are authors on the proportionate value of their works, I believe he would in his preference have judged wisely. He might be, probably has already been, replaced as a philosopher; he could scarcely be as a poet. Literature would less easily do without Woodnotes, Forerunners, Bacchus, Saadi, Monadnoc, than historical and critical science without Representative Men or Nature.

Deliberately he vowed himself to poetry, with a full sense of the obligations, even the divinity, of the calling. He became a voice with a message from the higher Powers. The poet must be mute until they unseal his mouth; they had opened, and had shut; they must reopen:

> Ye taught my lips a single speech,
> And a thousand silences.[1]

He need not sail the seas, or search humanity for sages to instruct him. At the destined moment a Teacher is at hand:

> Behold he watches at the door!
> Behold his shadow on the floor!
> Seek not beyond thy cottage wall
> Redeemers that can yield thee all

While thou sittest at thy door
On the desert's yellow floor,
Listening to the gray-haired crones,
Foolish gossips, ancient drones,
Saadi, see! they rise in stature
To the height of mighty Nature,
And the secret stands revealed
Fraudulent Time in vain concealed,—
That blessed gods in servile masks
Plied for thee thy household tasks.[2]

Let him dwell alone, not minding the reproach of sloth for folding his arms beside the woodland brook:

There was never mystery
But 'tis figured in the flowers;
Was never secret history
But birds tell it in the bowers.[3]

The pine-tree sings to him:

'Speak not thy speech my boughs among;
Put off thy years, wash in the breeze;
My hours are peaceful centuries.
Talk no more with feeble tongue;
No more the fool of space and time,
Come weave with me a nobler rhyme.
Only thy Americans
Can read thy line, can meet thy glance,
But the runes that I rehearse
Understands the universe;
The least breath my boughs which tossed
Brings again the Pentecost,
To every soul resounding clear
In a voice of solemn cheer,—
'Am I not thine? Are not these thine?'
And they reply, 'Forever mine!'
Come learn with me the fatal song
Which knits the world in music strong,
Come lift thine eyes to lofty rhymes,
Of things with things, of times with times,

Primeval chimes of sun and shade,
Of sound and echo, man and maid,
The land reflected in the flood,
Body with shadow still pursued.
For Nature beats in perfect tune,
And rounds with rhyme her every rune;
Whether she work in land or sea,
Or hide underground her alchemy.
Thou canst not wave thy staff in air,
Or dip thy paddle in the lake!
But it carves the bow of beauty there,
And the ripples in rhymes the oar forsake.
The wood is wiser far than thou;
The wood and wave each other know.
Not unrelated, unaffied,
But to each thought and thing allied,
Is perfect Nature's every part,
Rooted in the mighty Heart.' [4]

Spirit voices, though whence he never discovers, are continually sounding in his ear, to direct him on his way:

Long I followed happy guides,
I could never reach their sides;
Their step is forth, and, ere the day,
Breaks up their leaguer, and away.
Flowers they strew,—I catch the scent;
Or tone of silver instrument
Leaves on the wind melodious trace;
Yet I could never see their face.
I met many travellers,
Who the road had surely kept;
They saw not my fine revellers,—
These had crossed them while they slept.
Sometimes their strong speed they slacken,
Though they are not overtaken;
In sleep their jubilant troop is near,—
I tuneful voices overhear;
It may be in wood or waste,—
At unawares 'tis come and past.

Their near camp my spirit knows
By signs gracious as rainbows.
I thenceforward, and long after,
Listen for their harp-like laughter,
And carry in my heart, for days,
Peace that hallows rudest ways.[5]

The pursuit after beauty and truth, though it has its solaces, is long, and never more than partially successful. The end is not, though the God will refresh him awhile with the cup of

Wine which Music is,—
That I, drinking this,
Shall hear far Chaos talk with me;
Kings unborn shall walk with me;
And the poor grass shall plot and plan
What it will do when it is man.
Quickened so, will I unlock
Every crypt of every rock.[6]

Still, will darkness and dumbness be; although there are open hours,

When the God's will sallies free,
And the dull idiot might see
The flowing fortunes of a thousand years;—
Sudden, at unawares,
Self-moved, fly-to the doors,
Nor sword of angels could reveal
What they conceal.[7]

The poet should learn to rule, and, as a Sovereign, he proclaims his royal edicts:

The kingly bard
Must smite the chords rudely and hard,
As with hammer or with mace;
That they may render back
Artful thunder, which conveys
Secrets of the solar track,
Sparks of the supersolar blaze.[8]

Like the Supreme Pontiff, he is servus servorum also, and

must learn to obey; mindful always that he is but a minister executing Another's behest. It is the lot of all great souls:

> The hand that rounded Peter's dome,
> And groined the aisles of Christian Rome,
> Wrought in a sad sincerity;
> Himself from God he could not free;
> He builded better than he knew;—
> The conscious stone to beauty grew.
> The passive Master lent his hand
> To the vast soul that o'er him planned;
> And the same power that reared the shrine
> Bestrode the tribes that knelt within.
> Ever the fiery Pentecost
> Girds with one flame the countless host,
> Trances the heart through chanting choirs,
> And through the priest the mind inspires.[9]

Not that to him, chosen though he be, more than half-truths are disclosed. Existence constantly is asking riddles beyond human power of guessing. The Sphinx, interrogated, refers man to himself:

> Thou art the unanswered question;
> Couldst see thy proper eye,
> Always it asketh, asketh;
> And each answer is a lie.[10]

In the inevitable darkness he will seek inspiration from Love; from the Love Celestial, above all; but also from Dæmonic—that, not blind, but:

> radiant, sharpest-sighted god,
> Whose eyes pierce
> The Universe,
> Path-finder, road-builder,
> Mediator, royal-giver.[11]

Even he may venture among the shadows and uncertainty of common 'Initial Love', not complaining overmuch of

rebuffs; for he can comfort himself with the sure trust that:

> When half-gods go,
> The gods arrive.[12]

But the guiding star of his career is service to the Universe —to the perfect whole:

> All are needed by each one;
> Nothing is fair or good alone.
> I thought the sparrow's note from heaven,
> Sitting at dawn on the alder bough;
> I brought him home, in his nest, at even;
> He sings the song, but it cheers not now,
> For I did not bring home the river and sky;—
> He sang to my ear,—they sang to my eye.[13]

The supreme business of the Poet-Soul thus is to strive to comprehend the working of the World-Soul. He must not be shocked at what may seem to be the deity's pitilessness:

> He serveth the servant,
> The brave he loves amain;
> He kills the cripple and the sick,
> And straight begins again;
> For gods delight in gods,
> And thrust the weak aside;
> To him who scorns their charities,
> Their arms fly open wide.[14]

He will neither quarrel with his distribution of poverty to one and wealth to another doomed soon to be added

> to his land, a lump of mould the more;[15]

nor forget his bounty in

> Spreading May's leafless blooms in a damp nook,
> To please the desert and the sluggish brook;[16]

in endowing with warmth and brightness, and honeyed shrubs and vines, the burly humble-bee:

Insect lover of the sun,
Joy of thy dominion!
Sailor of the atmosphere;
Swimmer through the waves of air;
Voyager of light and noon:
Epicurean of June;[17]

in commissioning, to glorify all this earth of ours, the beneficent Spirit of Beauty:

Guest of million painted forms,
Which in turn thy glory warms!
The frailest leaf, the mossy bark,
The acorn's cup, the rainbow's arc,
The swinging spider's silver line,
The ruby of the drop of wine,
The shining pebble of the pond,
Thou inscribest with a bond,
In thy momentary play,
Would bankrupt nature to repay.[18]

Happy, here and there, a man who has learnt to enjoy the feast prepared for him:

And such I knew, a forest seer,
A minstrel of the natural year,
A lover true, who knew by heart
Each joy the mountain dales impart;
It seemed that nature could not raise
A plant in any secret place,
In quaking bog, on snowy hill,
Beneath the grass that shades the rill,
But he would come in the very hour
It opened in its virgin bower,
As if a sunbeam showed the place,
And tell its long-descended race.
What others did at distance hear,
And guessed within the thicket's gloom,
Was showed to this philosopher,
And at his bidding seemed to come.[19]

I am not concerned to expound the philosophy, which, generous, self-denying, reverent, as, in its own way, it is, produces a prevailing impression, less of open day, than of a gorgeous sunset. As little do I care to defend the habit of trimming verse to fit the thought, instead of harmonizing both. But, whatever the differences in form and diction between Emerson and better-recognized poets, at all events in one respect he can meet them on equal terms. With the greatest he shares the quality of passionate earnestness. Passion is an essential characteristic of pure poetry. A necessity of verse meant to move is that it shall have moved its author first. He must have been a little mad before his readers will feel the hurrying fire within themselves. Philosophy embodied in verse usually is heedless of this condition. Hence the disfavour with lovers of poetry under which commonly it labours. With Emerson thought of the profoundest acknowledges no servile obligation to be temperate and tame. That was not his nature.

The lovely dirge in which he laments his dead brothers amid the scenes they loved, itself glows throughout with a warm, clinging tenderness :

> In the long sunny afternoon,
> The plain was full of ghosts ;
> I wandered up, I wandered down,
> Beset by pensive hosts.
>
> The winding Concord gleamed below,
> Pouring as wide a flood
> As when my brothers, long ago,
> Came with me to the wood.
>
> But they are gone—the holy ones
> Who trod with me this lovely vale ;
> The strong, star-bright companions
> Are silent, low, and pale.

They coloured the horizon round;
  Stars flamed and faded as they bade;
All echoes hearkened for their sound,—
  They made the woodlands glad or mad.

I touch this flower of silken leaf,
  Which once our childhood knew;
Its soft leaves wound me with a grief
  Whose balsam never grew.

Hearken to yon pine-warbler
  Singing aloft in the tree!
Hearest thou, O traveller,
  What he singeth to me?

'Go, lonely man,' it saith;
'They loved thee from their birth;
Their hands were pure, and pure their faith,—
  There are no such hearts on earth.

You cannot unlock your heart,
  The key is gone with them;
The silent organ loudest chants
  The master's requiem.' [20]

But the fire and flame of fancy he reserved for explorations of the Incomprehensible. In the majestic hymn, or treatise, in which he seems determined to prove by explaining it, that Godhead, as imagined in his scheme of Being, is inexplicable, he falls into an ecstasy:

This vault which glows immense with light
Is the inn where he lodges for a night.
What recks such Traveller if the bowers
Which bloom and fade like meadow flowers
A bunch of fragrant lilies be,
Or the stars of eternity?
Alike to him the better, the worse,—
The glowing angel, the outcast corse.
Thou metest him by centuries,
And lo! he passes like the breeze;
Thou seek'st in globe and galaxy,
He hides in pure transparency;

Thou askest in fountains and in fires,—
He is the essence that inquires.
He is the axis of the star,
He is the sparkle of the spar,
He is the heart of every creature,
He is the meaning of each feature;
And his mind is the sky,
Than all it holds more deep, more high.[21]

Thought, as it flows from him, turns into red-hot steam. The heat is no occasional accident; it is an inherent property. Philosophy in such guise may well claim for itself the prerogatives and honours of poetic inspiration; and none who study Emerson's verse will refuse them to it and him.

The Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson. Five vols. (vol. iv: Letters, Social Aims, Poems). Boston: Houghton, Mifflin & Co., 1882. Also The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson. Two vols. (vol. i, The Poems). London: G. Bell & Sons, 1879.

[1] Merops, vol. i, p. 471 (1879 ed.).
[2] Saadi, vol. iv, p. 39 (1882 ed.).
[3] The Apology, vol. i, p. 466 (1879 ed.).
[4] Woodnotes, vol. iv, pp. 134–5 (1882 ed.).
[5] Forerunners, vol. iv, pp. 68–9 (ibid.).
[6] Bacchus, vol. iv, p. 118 (ibid.).
[7] Merlin, vol. iv, p. 116 (ibid.).
[8] Ibid., vol. iv, p. 114 (ibid.).
[9] The Problem, vol. iv, pp. 14–15 (ibid.).
[10] The Sphinx, vol. iv, p. 11 (ibid.).
[11] Initial, Dæmonic, and Celestial Love, vol. iv. pp. 104–5 (ibid.).
[12] Give all to Love, vol. iv, p. 451 (ibid.).
[13] Each and All, vol. iv, p. 12 (ibid.).
[14] The World-Soul, p. 27 (ibid.).
[15] The Hamatreya, pp. 70–1 (ibid.).
[16] The Rhodora, p. 58 (ibid.).
[17] The Humble-bee, p. 59 (ibid.).
[18] Ode to Beauty, pp. 80–1 (ibid.).
[19] Woodnotes, iv, pp. 127–8 (ibid.).
[20] Dirge, p. 188–9 (1882 ed.).
[21] Woodnotes, ii, p. 140 (ibid.).

EDGAR ALLAN POE

1811—1849

THEY are all dreams, if manufactured dreams—The Raven, Lenore, The Bells, Annabel Lee, Eulalie, Ulalume, Dreamland, The City in the Sea, A Dream within a Dream, For Annie, Bridal Ballad, Israfel, To Helen. We see things happening, being done, being suffered. We hear words. We speak them. Though we are there only because we are subject or object, we know we have nothing in reality to do with the whole. We are conscious that it is an illusion from which we are sure to wake up, if once we can shake ourselves. Throughout the entire range of poetry nothing like it is to be found; not Christabel: Kubla Khan may compare, though chiefly by way of contrast of the spontaneity in it with the artifice in Poe. In prose some of De Quincey's visions might stand in the same line, were they not pervaded by a palpable reasonableness. Poe's in a sense have neither thought nor feeling; and in a sense they are nothing else. Somewhere, several years ago, a writer supposed Man to possess, or be possessed by, two souls; one immortal, a heavenly spark; the other at any rate not heavenly, and certainly mortal, capable of dying with the flesh. That is the sort of soul which animates Poe's verse, if not himself.

The grace and melody of most of his few poems are indisputable, and all but impossible to analyse and define. The charm is as inscrutable. In The Raven wave after wave of solemn mystery keeps rolling up. There is the opening scene:

Once upon a midnight dreary, while I pondered, weak and weary,
Over many a quaint and curious volume of forgotten lore;
While I nodded, nearly napping, suddenly there came a tapping,
As of some one gently rapping—rapping at my chamber door.
'"Tis some visitor," I muttered, 'tapping at my chamber door;
Only this, and nothing more.'

Something seems about to happen, as, on the discovery that the sound is at the window lattice:

Open here I flung the shutter, when, with many a flirt and flutter,
In there stepped a stately Raven of the saintly days of yore.
Not the least obeisance made he; not a minute stopped or stayed he;
But, with mien of lord or lady, perched above my chamber door—
Perched upon a bust of Pallas just above my chamber door—
Perched, and sat, and nothing more.

'Nothing more' in fact; for:

the Raven, never flitting, still is sitting, still is sitting
On the pallid bust of Pallas, just above my chamber door;
And his eyes have all the seeming of a demon's that is dreaming,
And the lamplight o'er him streaming throws his shadow on the floor;
And my soul from out that shadow that lies floating on the floor
Shall be lifted—nevermore![1]

Yet, withal, a sentiment is produced that things of import are, and have been, happening, and will happen; that the atmosphere teems with them; and that the key to the secret is held by the Raven.

Then there is the sister conundrum, Lenore:

Come, let the burial rite be read, the funeral song be sung;
An anthem for the queenliest dead that ever died so young,—
A dirge for her, the doubly dead, in that she died so young.[2]

Ever we seem to be clutching hold of the fringe of an idea, which, the moment we draw it nearer, breaks between our fingers:

'Wretches! ye loved her for her wealth and hated her for her pride,
And when she fell in feeble health ye blessed her, that she died!
How shall the ritual, then, be read—the requiem how be sung,
By you—by yours, the evil eye—by yours, the slanderous tongue,
That did to death the innocence that died, and died so young?'[3]

Not that either is otherwise than clear and simple by the side of Ulalume! A maze of fantastic, intentionally dishevelled romance that; yet of an absurd, preposterous beauty, smelling strong of the lamp by the light of which doubtless it was conjured up, on the

night in the lonesome October
Of my most immemorial year;

when,

through an alley Titanic
Of cypress, I roamed with my Soul,—
Of cypress, with Psyche, my Soul.
These were days when my heart was volcanic
As the scoriac rivers that roll,—
As the lavas that restlessly roll
Their sulphurous currents down Yaanek
In the ultimate climes of the pole,—
That groan as they roll down Mount Yaanek
In the realms of the boreal pole![4]

Relatively the lay of The Bells is simple and sane, as they sound their appeals of triumph, dismay, anger, and lamentation, till we feel, as it were, the tower rocking under our feet. But even there the reader is puzzled by the gratuitous cruelty of the ringers of the chimes—that

The people—ah, the people—
They that dwell up in the steeple,
All alone,
Tolling, tolling, tolling,
In that muffled monotone,
Feel a glory in so rolling
On the human heart a stone.[5]

Annabel Lee itself, which, besides being bewitchingly sweet, is rational, still contains an enigma, if one needing no Daniel for its solution :

It was many and many a year ago,
In a kingdom by the sea,
That a maiden there lived whom you may know
By the name of Annabel Lee ;
And this maiden she lived with no other thought
Than to love and be loved by me.

I was a child, and she was a child,
In this kingdom by the sea ;
But we loved with a love that was more than love,
I and my Annabel Lee ;
With a love that the wingèd seraphs of heaven
Coveted her and me.

The angels, not half so happy in heaven,
Went envying her and me ;
Yes ! that was the reason—as all men know,
In this kingdom by the sea—
That the wind came out of the cloud by night
Chilling and killing my Annabel Lee.[6]

And last, far from least, For Annie ! On the face of it a riddle—or it would not be Edgar Allan Poe's—it is, like Annabel Lee, soon guessed ; only, the answer is as difficult as the question. But the theme is grandly audacious, almost sublime ; just an ecstasy of life's unexplained, perhaps inexplicable, perhaps unreal, unreasonable despair, become, if not bliss, a tranquil trance, through the embrace of Death by Love :

Thank Heaven the crisis,
The danger is past,
And the lingering illness
Is over at last ;
And the fever called 'living'
Is conquered at last.

And I rest so composedly
  Now in my bed,
That any beholder
  Might fancy me dead—
Might start at beholding me,
  Thinking me dead.

And, O! of all tortures
  That torture the worst
Has abated—the terrible
  Torture of thirst
For the naphthaline river
  Of Passion accurst;
I have drunk of a water
  That quenches all thirst:—

And, ah! let it never
  Be foolishly said
That my room it is gloomy
  And narrow my bed;
For man never slept
  In a different bed—
And, to sleep, you must slumber
  In just such a bed.

And so I lie happily,
  Bathing in many
A dream of the truth
  And the beauty of Annie—
Drowned in a bath
  Of the tresses of Annie.

She tenderly kissed me,
  She fondly caressed,
And then I fell gently
  To sleep on her breast—
Deeply to sleep
  From the heaven of her breast.

When the light was extinguished
  She covered me warm,
And she prayed to the angels
  To keep me from harm—
To the queen of the angels
  To shield me from harm.

And I lie so composedly
  Now in my bed,
Knowing her love,
  That you fancy me dead;
And I rest so contentedly
  Now in my bed,
With her love at my breast,
  That you fancy me dead—
That you shudder to look at me,
  Thinking me dead.

But my heart it is brighter
  Than all of the many
Stars in the sky,
  For it sparkles with Annie—
It glows with the light
  Of the love of my Annie—
With the thought of the light
  Of the eyes of my Annie.[7]

After all the great poems I have been studying, I cannot read this without fresh surprise at the potentialities of poetry. Its death-warmed passion is overpowering. I am inclined to rank it highest in Poe's poetic work. Nothing surpasses it in soaring fancy, or equals it in ideas and spiritual power.

At the same time, in method of workmanship I see little difference between it and the rest of this minute body of verse. In it, as elsewhere, I observe the deliberate laying of snares to surprise; the same habit of recurrence

to one theme. I find between it and, for instance, The Raven, a yet more intimate analogy; a relationship of one to the other as its converse. Thus, in The Raven, the reader is continually led on to expect an event of import which never happens; in For Annie, the very ordinary idea which we supposed we were contemplating develops into a monstrosity of fancy at once spectral, material, and beautiful. Contrasted as are the results, I believe the art to be virtually identical. The effect Poe desired to compass by a poem would seem to have been that of a single long pulsating shock, starting one does not know whence. It was a point of pride with him, both that he should be able to tell himself he had accomplished his object in conformity with rigid rules, and that his readers should never guess them.

He himself paraded in print the absence of spontaneous inspiration from his composition of The Raven. It was, he has told the world, the product of a mechanical operation he had cunningly devised. He who had boasted that with him 'poetry was not a purpose, but a passion', details elaborately how and why he introduced beauty, with its highest expression, sadness, and death; a refrain, with a bird—by choice a raven—to repeat it, in unconscious unison with the throbbings of despair in dead Lenore's lover; and, beneath all, a suggestive undercurrent of further meaning;—deliberately confining the whole within a few more than one hundred lines.[8]

The explanation at the time tasked the capacity of popular belief more even than he weirdness of the poem hypnotized common understandings. A natural conjecture was that Poe either deceived himself into measuring back step by step ground his fancy had already taken in its stride, or simply was diverting himself with an experiment

on public credulity. Really, however, what would have been an altogether unlikely mystification if imputed to another poet, ceases to be wholly incredible with respect to him. The iron rigour with which in The Raven the thread —chain rather—of the central idea is stretched stiff and taut favours indeed the suggestion of artifice rather than an unpremeditated flight of imagination. At all events no poet but himself could have tried to persuade his readers to think they smelt in his inspiration the sawdust and oil of the workshop.

Although no critic, not even Poe himself, has attempted to apply the extreme mechanical theory to others of his poems, it cannot be denied that in general they are liable to the charge of an excess of art. None breathe of simple nature. Even the elegance of the lines to Helen with her ' Naiad airs ', which bring admirers

> home
> To the glory that was Greece,
> And the grandeur that was Rome,[9]

is but dumb sculpture, though of ivory and gold. Though a spontaneous spark—a lurid one—from the soul kindles the dead man's appeal to his love For Annie, its rush of fire is constrained ; it has had to flame along a line ruled for, not by, it. Never was verse of such apparent, and so little real, freedom as all of Poe's ; or, consequently, so artistic, which is less satisfying ; so pure of loose taint with less of wholesome freshness. No healthful breeze blows from off its Dead Sea surface. No singing birds fly over it ; though itself, in its ebb and flow, makes song, harmony, fairy music. Whatever he wrote, from his precocious and libertine, not idle, youth to the delirious end in the Baltimore hospital, possesses the same qualities of unfailing grace and tone. But the whole is like a reverie

between sleep and waking, always fascinating, never restful, with an atmosphere about it as of a sepulchral vault.

Works of Edgar Allan Poe, ed. J. H. Ingram. Four vols. 1874–5. Also Poetical Works, ed. James Hannay. London: Charles Grffiin, 1852.

[1] The Raven, stanzas 1, 7, 18.
[2] Lenore, st. 1.
[3] Ibid., st. 2.
[4] Ulalume, st. 2.
[5] The Bells, st. 4.
[6] Annabel Lee, stanzas 1, 2, 4.
[7] For Annie, stanzas 1, 3, 6, 8, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15.
[8] Philosophy of Composition (Works), vol. ii, pp. 262–70.
[9] To Helen (Poems written in Youth), st. 2.

HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW

1807—1882

THE poetry of echoes, of shadows, of wandering clouds, which have caught sunset purples. Literature numbers poets without forefathers or descendants. Such were Homer, the Attic dramatists, Chaucer, the Elizabethans, Chatterton, Burns. There have been poets, great poets, with ancestry and successors, like Pope. Others, real too there have been; foster children suckled on milk of strangers, and in an atmosphere not their own. In default of examples and models from without, they might never have sung. Such is Longfellow. If inspiration ever were traceable, it would be seen that his library had inspired him. Diction and manner he seldom borrows; impulses, emotions, constantly. The limitations observable in his work are the inevitable consequences. No Pindaric strain is to be expected; no soaring to the heights. Momentum thus adventitious is exhausted too soon to supply impetus for a free career. It is an admirable supplement to native sweetness, intelligence, tenderness, sense of picturesqueness. A hundred delicate chords must have been thrilling through Longfellow's temperament, as the vibrations of extraneous, scarcely alien, minstrelsy touched them into music. To many natures the counter-note is actually more delightful, more awakening, than the unsoftened, full principal. Certainly the reflected character of the melody is the secret of the charm of a lovely ghost of medievalism like the Golden Legend.

Never was poet humbler toward his elders in the

vocation; more modest and reverential; yet in a sense also more exacting. His nature incorporated as much as it could of other poetic souls. Something was extracted here, something there. Every constituent in the new creation was genuine, with characteristics of its own, but compressed to meet the demands of the rest. Each was kept malleable to receive a stamp from the borrowing self. That self was thoughtful without being a thinker; given to learning, not to research; sympathetically inquisitive, not philosophic; accustomed to look to a printed page to put fancy in motion. From the vast store of his reading Longfellow selected instinctively whatever he could assimilate and feel. In his poems we have the fruit of his studies; and their essence has become his. There the explanation is of the anger, the bitter contempt, which his successive earlier volumes stirred in divers critics at the times of their appearance. They were irritated by catching and losing hold continually of clues to sources from which he had drawn. They raged at the self-complacency, as they regarded it, with which he propounded discoveries by illustrious predecessors as novelties of his own. They did not care to understand that his poetry came finally from his heart, whencesoever its elements might have been derived; that what to them were truisms were for him very truths. For his public they were truths too, and living truths. He was absolutely sincere when he preached venerable moralities, like the Psalm of Life and Excelsior, as a new Gospel. The undoubting confidence with which he proclaimed it, if it raised up scoffers by the dozen, brought him disciples by the ten thousand.

The jeers, coming from the intellectual class in the Old Country, must, I am afraid, have caused aches beyond the power of applause by the multitude to heal. All his work

indicates a delicate, sensitive organism. It was an accident that his early popularity was largely due to some sounding platitudes. Platitudes are not necessarily criminal. Literature is paved with them. Often they have been with our greatest the nursing-mothers of royal sublimities. In Longfellow's verse they are naïve and graceful; but it was his misfortune that they won him admiration, which, for poets to be allowed to bear it in comfort, ought to fall, a halo, from above, and not steam rankly up from below. He endured the consequent obloquy, however wounding, with uncomplaining dignity. He did not, like famous English contemporaries, turn upon his assailants and rend them.

The excellence of some of his work was never denied, and is indisputable. His translations, especially from the German and Spanish, are full of beauty. That of Coplas de Manrique's Ode on his father Rodrigo's death is grave and noble. Others from Müller, Uhland, Salis, enhance the merits of the originals. Take, for examples, Whither? the Statue over the Cathedral Door, the legend of the Crossbill, and the lovely Song of the Silent Land:

Into the Silent Land!
Ah! who shall lead us thither?
Clouds in the evening sky more darkly gather,
And shattered wrecks lie thicker on the strand.
Who leads us with a gentle hand
Thither, O thither,
Into the Silent Land?

Into the Silent Land?
To you, ye boundless regions
Of all perfection! Tender morning-visions
Of beauteous souls! The Future's pledge and band!
Who in Life's battle firm doth stand,
Shall bear Hope's tender blossoms
Into the Silent Land!

O Land! O Land!
For all the broken-hearted
The mildest herald by our fate allotted,
Beckons, and with inverted torch doth stand
To lead us with a gentle hand
Into the land of the great Departed,
Into the Silent Land![1]

Gradually the sneering even at his original verse went out of fashion, as volume after volume demonstrated an unmistakable poet. Evangeline had been a revelation to many; and surely fancy rarely has created a sweeter maiden, equal alike to joy and tears:

Fair was she to behold, that maiden of seventeen summers;
But a celestial brightness—a more ethereal beauty—
Shone on her face and encircled her form, when, after confession,
Homeward serenely she walked with God's benediction upon her.
When she had passed, it seemed like the ceasing of exquisite music.[2]

Purists could bring no graver reproach than the hexameters. Hiawatha, notwithstanding its hendecasyllables, converted others. Mark Pattison, who objected to Longfellow for his indulgence in truisms, was obliged to praise the comparison of the advent of jostling human disasters to the gathering of a swarm of vultures:

Never stoops the soaring vulture
On his quarry in the desert,
On the sick or wounded bison,
But another vulture, watching
From his high aerial look-out,
Sees the downward plunge, and follows;
And a third pursues the second,
Coming from the invisible ether,
First a speck, and then a vulture,
Till the air is dark with pinions.[3]

The wonder to me is, as I recall the fight on the poet's behalf, how any opposition should have survived the still

earlier publication of a romance so enchanting as The Golden Legend.

At present controversy is over; and Longfellow's place is assured. For many, whom Shelley, Wordsworth, Keats, Browning, only dazzle, tire, or bewilder, poetry nevertheless is a necessity of existence. On their natures Longfellow's serene imaginings shed an effluence comforting and tranquillizing. They are not offended by a lack of originality and profundity, as in Footsteps of Angels, when in the firelit dusk,

> the forms of the departed
> Enter at the open door;
> The beloved, the true-hearted,
> Come to visit me once more; [4]

in the reminiscence of a walk to church

> with thee,
> O gentlest of my friends!
>
> Thy dress was like the lilies,
> And thy heart as pure as they;
> One of God's holy messengers
> Did walk with me that day.
>
> I saw the branches of the trees
> Bend down thy touch to meet,
> The clover-blossoms in the grass
> Rise up to kiss thy feet; [5]

in The Bridge, with its

> long procession
> Still passing to and fro,
> The young heart hot and restless,
> And the old subdued and slow; [6]

in the laudation of the red Planet Mars:

The star of the unconquered will,
He rises in my breast,
Serene, and resolute, and still,
And calm, and self-possessed ; [7]

in The Reaper and the Flowers :

'My Lord has need of these flowerets gay,'
The Reaper said, and smiled ;
'Dear tokens of the earth are they,
Where he was once a child.

They shall all bloom in fields of light,
Transplanted by my care,
And saints upon their garments white,
These sacred blossoms wear ;' [8]

or in Blind Bartimeus's importunate petition, with its musical Greek.[9] They only know, and are content to know, that such strains calm troubled nerves, and touch the heart.

Even persons who habitually require of poetry that it shall stimulate and inflame, have occasional moods inclining them to listen to gentler music :

Not from the grand old masters,
Not from the bards sublime,
Whose distant footsteps echo
Through the corridors of Time.

For, like strains of martial music,
Their mighty thoughts suggest
Life's endless toil and endeavour ;
And to-night I long for rest.

Read from some humbler poet,
Whose songs gushed from his heart,
As showers from the clouds of summer,
Or tears from the eyelids start ;

And the night shall be filled with music,
And the cares that infest the day,
Shall fold their tents, like the Arabs,
And as silently steal away.[10]

Nowhere may the thought, the feeling itself, rise from unknown depths; but the singer had been in spiritual companionship with great minds of the past and the present; and a consciousness, dim, suspicious, and hesitating at first, came at length to pervade each side of the Atlantic that his lesser instrument beats time in unison with theirs.

Never, indeed, was there a more grateful, a more enthusiastic sympathy than his. He rejoiced to dwell upon grand deeds as well as upon grand thoughts. His fancy haunted the scenes of memorable actions, and the homes of their doers. For many of us it is impossible to visit cities where he has been without tracing his footsteps by a gracious light they have left behind them. We find him in Nuremberg attending upon the illustrious in song and art:

Here, when Art was still religion, with a simple, reverent heart,
Lived and laboured Albrecht Dürer, the Evangelist of Art;
Hence in silence and in sorrow, toiling still with busy hand,
Like an emigrant he wandered, seeking for the Better Land.
'Emigravit' is the inscription on the tombstone where he lies;
Dead he is not—but departed—for the artist never dies.
Fairer seems the ancient city, and the sunshine seems more fair,
That he once has trod its pavement, that he once has breathed its air![11]

His verse beautifies Würtzburg's minster towers with the memory of Walter von der Vogelweid the Minnesinger, and his bequest to his teachers in the art of song:

Thus the bard of love departed;
And, fulfilling his desire,
On his tomb the birds were feasted
By the children of the choir.

There they sang their merry carols,
Sang their lauds on every side;
And the name their voices uttered
Was the name of Vogelweid.

Time has long effaced the inscriptions
On the cloister's funeral stones,
And tradition only tells us
Where repose the poet's bones.

But around the vast Cathedral,
By sweet echoes multiplied,
Still the birds repeat the legend,
And the name of Vogelweid.[12]

If I were ever, as doubtless I shall never be, in the Palace of Palermo, modern as it is, I should expect

through the open window, loud and clear,
To hear the monks chant in the Chapel near,
Above the stir and tumult of the street:
'He has put down the mighty from their seat,
And has exalted them of low degree!'[13]

For thousands of travellers since Longfellow, have,

As the evening shades descended,
Low and loud and sweetly blended,
Low at times and loud at times,
And changing like a poet's rhymes,
Rung the beautiful wild chimes
From the belfry in the market
Of the ancient town of Bruges.

They still have heard, blending with their dreams,

those magic numbers,
As they loud proclaimed the flight
And stolen marches of the night;
Till their chimes in sweet collision
Mingled with each wandering vision,
Mingled with the fortune-telling
Gipsy-bands of dreams and fancies,
Which amid the waste expanses
Of the silent land of trances
Have their solitary dwelling.[14]

Peculiar, and exotic, as, for twentieth-century Europe,

remains the capital of Bohemia, the American student-poet's track will be discernible there too by an added touch of eeriness through his

> legend strange and vague,
> That a midnight host of spectres pale
> Beleaguered the walls of Prague.
>
> Beside the Moldau's rushing stream,
> With the wan moon overhead,
> There stood, as in an awful dream,
> The army of the dead.
>
> White as a sea-fog, landward bound,
> The spectral camp was seen,
> And, with a sorrowful, deep sound,
> The river flowed between.[15]

The old world early laid its spell upon Longfellow's fancy; and it was never taken off. We see in the story, truly Golden, of Elsie and Prince Henry of Hoheneck, how potent and lasting was the impress. Scholars might discover errors and misconceptions in that delightful Mystery. Few, I think, will care to deny its fidelity to the spirit. At all events the charm of its scenes, almost bewildering in their variety, is irresistible. There is a fine humour in the portraiture of the glorious Cellarer of the Black Forest monastery, as he samples, to begin, the precious wine of the Holy Ghost:

> Ah! how the streamlet laughs and sings!
> What a delicious fragrance springs
> From the deep flagon, while it fills,
> As of hyacinths and daffodils!
> Between this cask and the Abbot's lips
> Many have been the sips and slips.
> O cordial delicious! O soother of pain!
> It flashes like sunshine into my brain!

And now a flagon for such as may ask
A draught from the noble Bacharach cask,
And I will be gone, though I know full well
The cellar 's a cheerfuller place than the cell.[16]

The devotion to his art of the Friar in the Scriptorium, as he closes work at dusk, and gazes from his window, makes a delightful contrast :

How sweet the air is ! How fair the scene !
I wish I had as lovely a green
To paint my landscapes and my leaves !
How the swallows twitter under the eaves !
There, now, there is one in her nest ;
I can just catch a glimpse of her head and breast,
And will sketch her thus in her quiet nook,
For the margin of my Gospel book.[17]

And, lastly, the ecstasy of Monk Felix—taught, by the lapse of a hundred years in as many moments of a bird's song, that nothing with God is impossible—is something to dream of :

One morning, all alone,
Out of his convent of gray stone,
Into the forest, older, darker, grayer,
His lips moving as if in prayer,
His head sunken upon his breast,
As in a dream of rest,
Walked the Monk Felix. All about
The broad, sweet sunshine lay without,
Filling the summer air ;
And within the woodlands as he trod,
The twilight was like the Truce of God
With worldly woe and care ;
Under him lay the golden moss ;
And above him the boughs of hemlock-trees
Waved, and made the sign of the Cross,
And whispered their Benedicites.

He heeded not, but pondered
On the volume in his hand,
A volume of Saint Augustine,
Wherein he read of the unseen
Splendours of God's great town
In the unknown land,
And, with his eyes cast down
In humility, he said:
'I believe, O God,
What herein I have read,
But, alas! I do not understand!'
And lo! he heard
The sudden singing of a bird,
A snow-white bird that, from a cloud
Dropped down,
And among the branches brown
Sat singing
So sweet, and clear, and loud,
It seemed a thousand harpstrings ringing.
And the Monk Felix closed his book,
And long, long,
With rapturous look,
He listened to the song,
And hardly breathed or stirred,
Until he saw, as in a vision,
The land Elysian,
And in the heavenly city heard
Angelic feet
Fall on the golden flagging of the street.
And he would fain
Have caught the wondrous bird,
But strove in vain;
For it flew away, away,
Far over hill and dell,
And instead of its sweet singing
He heard the Convent bell
Suddenly in the silence ringing
For the service of noonday.
And he retraced
His pathway homeward sadly and in haste.[18]

If the many productions of Longfellow's later years did not often rise to the level of this, yet things of beauty were interspersed; and already he had permanently triumphed over prejudice and fastidiousness. Had he been one to boast, he might have claimed that English literature could more easily dispense with several of his brilliant contemporaries than with him. Nevertheless—I cannot but suspect, cannot but fear, that the singer of the woful and sweet tragedy of Grand-Pré, of the Indian Edda—as various as it is harmonious—of the frankness of the bright Puritan maiden, of the Golden Legend itself, may sometimes have sighed to himself, as his brush laid-on his silvery moonlight, or evening afterglow—may have been tempted to envy the stormy passionateness of members of his craft both in the New World and the Old—may have complained of his Muse that she was placidly content to reflect the radiance of other luminaries instead of burning with fire of her own.

The Poetical Works of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. Complete Edition. London: George Routledge & Sons, 1865.

[1] Song of the Silent Land. From the German of Salis.
[2] Evangeline, Part I.
[3] The Song of Hiawatha, XIX, The Ghosts.
[4] Footsteps of Angels.
[5] A Gleam of Sunshine.
[6] The Bridge.
[7] The Light of Stars.
[8] The Reaper and the Flowers.
[9] Blind Bartimeus.
[10] The Day is Done, stanzas 5, 6, 7, 10, 11.
[11] Nuremberg.
[12] Walter von Vogelweid.
[13] King Robert of Sicily.
[14] The Belfry of Bruges: Carillon
[15] The Beleaguered City.
[16] The Golden Legend, iv.
[17] Ibid.
[18] Ibid., ii.

JAMES RUSSELL LOWELL

1819—1891

LOWELL might be forgiven if in later life he had grown jealous of Hosea Biglow. The Biglow Papers shone with a brilliancy which, in the eyes of the ordinary reader, put out the flame of a lifetime of serious versifying. By many admirers of the Papers it seems almost to be forgotten even now that their author was a poet by profession. Certainly very few act as if they were aware that his poetry is of a kind particularly requiring quiet, intelligent, and, I may say, continuous, study. Not that his crusade of satire against slavery was a casual adventure, or tour de force, outside of his regular course. On the contrary, it was a natural stage in his career, and ought to be reckoned as one of its milestones. He did not belong to the old order of poets. They were by profession, as it might happen, soldiers and sailors, courtiers, diplomatists, politicians, churchmen, mystics, dramatists, men of letters, first. By compulsion of imagination, or by accident, they were poets afterwards. As little is he to be classed among those who in these latter days have fenced round for themselves a life apart, as a shrine for their chosen Muse. It could not have occurred to him to appropriate his age, with its joys, troubles, and interests, as mere material and incentive for inspiration. He never dissembled either his occupation of poet, or that as poet he was citizen also, and fighter, and preacher. Wherever the battle of humanity was hottest, there was he to be found, with his lyre. In the intervals

he mounted the pulpit. His poems, the serious as much as the burlesque and satirical, the Ghost-Seer, and Hunger and Cold, equally with the Biglow Papers, are part of the history of the period and its thought. Justly to appreciate either sort, his reader must in memory, or in fancy, descend into the field, and imagine himself a combatant.

A necessary result is some risk of confusing in the poetry matter and spirit. The ethereal is apt to get chained to an incident antiquated or dead. When the subject-matter is philosophy, it is philosophy blown red-hot with disputation. The song, which at the time it was sung was itself the comment, now itself wants commentaries. Not everybody is able, and comparatively few are at pains, to read between the lines. Then too the poet's impetuous fluency adds to the turmoil. His fancy exulting in the chances of a fiery conflict, whether to end in a victory or a rout, would burst into a rush of verse. On it sped, disdaining to be stayed while there was a public still passionate enough to supply readers. As I turn page after page, it is tantalizing to feel that a living idea, a burning thought, is gasping for breath beneath a cinder-pile of newspaper wranglings, or of free-fights in Congress. To its lovers poetry is self-sufficing, a being with a complete life of its own, neither a conflagration, nor a scaffolding. They are no better pleased when the bard abandons party strife, and takes, as his legitimate and normal vocation, to philosophy. Readers of Lowell are generally between Scylla and Charybdis. They are offered their choice of vital social and metaphysical problems to guess, one more intricate than another. He never sat down to write a line without a driving sense of a message to deliver, now down upon earth, and now aloft among the stars. His public is expected to follow and decipher the whole. Wisdom,

generous indignation, phosphoric wit, criticism, constructive as well as destructive, lightnings opening Heaven as they strike the earth, are all there. The pity is that too often either the thinker has overlaid the poet, or the inspiration is playing about a dead theme. It is as when a canvas has rotted under a masterpiece of art.

The poet, however, is there always, though, it may be, in the background ; it is the readers, I am afraid, who are likely to be in default. The general public neither interests itself in bygone partisanships, nor has spare intelligence for dialectics. Even an enthusiast for poetry does not expect to have to keep the fire on his hearth alight with the ashes of yesterday, or steam coal. None could perceive more clearly how he missed popularity for his graver verse, or bear the loss more cheerfully, than Lowell himself :

> who 's striving Parnassus to climb
> With a whole bale of ' isms ' tied together with rhyme ; [1]

and, visiting Chartres,

> to feed my eye,
> And give to Fancy one clear holiday,
> Scarce saw the minster for the thoughts it stirred ;—
> The painted windows, freaking gloom with glow,
> Dusking the sunshine which they seem to cheer,
> Meet symbol of the senses and the soul,
> And the whole pile, grim with the Northman's thought
> Of life and death, and doom, life's equal fee.[2]

When the poet in him has clear possession of the field, the sadder and more pensive phases of human experience still are those to which he turns by preference. He mourns the death of an infant son :

> A cherub who had lost his way
> And wandered hither, so his stay

With us was short, and 'twas most meet
That he should be no delver in earth's clod,
Nor need to pause and cleanse his feet
To stand before his God:
Oh, blest word—Evermore![3]

The contrast between universal laughing, busy nature and the sudden pause and muteness of death surprises, and bewilders him:

The bee hums on; around the blossomed vine
Whirs the light humming-bird; the cricket chirps;
The locust's shrill alarum stings the ear;
Hard by, the cock shouts lustily; from farm to farm,
His cheery brothers, telling of the sun,
Answer, till far away the joyance dies:
We never knew before how God had filled
The summer air with happy living sounds;
All round us seems an overplus of life,
And yet the one dear heart lies cold and still.[4]

He gazes down, while he shudders, at the abyss, yet deeper than the grave, which separates the nearest and dearest from the darkened mind:

There thou sittest; now and then thou moanest;
Thou dost talk with what we cannot see,
Lookest at us with an eye so doubtful,
It doth put us very far from thee;
There thou sittest; we would fain be nigh thee,
But we know that it can never be.—

Strange it is that, in this open brightness,
Thou shouldst sit in such a narrow cell;
Strange it is that thou shouldest be so lonesome
Where those are who love thee all so well;
Not so much of thee is left among us
As the hum outliving the hushed bell.[5]

Akin to the attraction—with more still in it of the attraction of repulsion—which draws him to the contem-

plation of the mystery of death, is the impulse to picture the contrast of luxury and want. Amid scenes of careless, wasteful revelry, he ever is seeing how at the gay dancers two grim Sisters, with

> Wolves' eyes, through the windows peer;
> Little dream they you are near,
> Hunger and Cold!—
>
> Scatter ashes on thy head,
> Tears of burning sorrow shed,
> Earth! and be by Pity led
> To Love's fold;
>
> Ere they block the very door
> With lean corpses of the poor,
> And will hush for naught but gore,
> Hunger and Cold![6]

It is like him that he allows a farewell glow of light and happiness to cheer sheer forlornness, however originating:

> The sharp storm cuts her forehead bare,
> And piercing through her garments thin,
> Beats on her shrunken breast, and there
> Makes colder the cold heart within.
>
> She lingers where a ruddy glow
> Streams outward through an open shutter,
> Adding more bitterness to woe,
> More loneness to desertion utter.
>
> She hears a woman's voice within,
> Singing sweet words her childhood knew,
> And years of misery and sin
> Furl off, and leave her heaven blue.
>
> Enhaloed by a mild, warm glow,
> From man's humanity apart,
> She hears old footsteps wandering slow
> Through the lone chambers of the heart.—

Next morning something heavily
  Against the opening door did weigh,
And there, from sin and sorrow free,
  A woman on the threshold lay.—

For, whom the heart of man shuts out,
  Sometimes the heart of God takes in,
And fences them all round about
  With silence 'mid the world's loud din.[7]

But for soulless greed, for the irredeemably lost bondsmen of gold, whom he meets in the noisy City's streets, his creed spares not a glimmer :

They pass me by like shadows, crowds on crowds,
Dim ghosts of men, that hover to and fro,
Hugging their bodies round them, like thin shrouds
Wherein their souls were buried long ago.
. . . . . .
Lo ! how they wander round the world, their grave,
Whose ever gaping maw by such is fed,
Gibbering at living men, and idly rave,
'We, only, truly live, but ye are dead.'
Alas ! poor fools, the anointed eye may trace
A dead soul's epitaph in every face ![8]

Happily he possessed, and from time to time used, the gift of simple sweetness, as well as those of preacher and judge. Readers, if they please, may sun themselves in pure charm, seeking nothing further. The deafness to divine singing, until the minstrel has departed back to his native Heaven, was never more prettily moralized than in the ballad of the exile of Phoebus Apollo from Olympus to the sheep-folds of King Admetus :

Men granted that his speech was wise,
  But, when a glance they caught
Of his slim grace and woman's eyes,
  They laughed, and called him good-for-naught.

Yet after he was dead and gone,
And e'en his memory dim,
Earth seemed more sweet to live upon,
More full of love, because of him.
And day by day more holy grew
Each spot where he had trod,
Till after-poets only knew
Their first-born brother as a god.[9]

As his pen wanders about the glades, the forest becomes a woodland enchanted!

The great August noonlight,
Through myriad rifts slanted,
Leaf and bole thickly sprinkles
With flickering gold;
There in warm August gloaming,
With quick, silent brightenings,
From meadow-lands roaming,
The fire-fly twinkles
His fitful heat-lightnings.
The little fount twinkles
Its silver saints'-bells,
That no sprite ill-boding
May make his abode in
Those innocent dells.[10]

He dreams bright dreams, as he watches the despised dandelion fringing, in blithesome May, the dusty road with harmless gold:

Then think I of deep shadows on the grass,
Of meadows where in sun the cattle graze,
Where, as the breezes pass,
The gleaming rushes lean a thousand ways;
Of leaves that slumber in a cloudy mass,
Or whiten in the wind; of waters blue
That from the distance sparkle through
Some woodland gap, and of a sky above,
Where one white cloud, like a stray lamb, doth move.[11]

Heaven and earth seem to meet in his tale of the Christ-

like Yussouf's dealing with the outcast, whom he was helping with horse and money to flee the avengers of blood :

'O Sheik, I cannot leave thee so ;
I will repay thee ; all this thou hast done
Unto that Ibrahim who slew thy son ! '
'Take thrice the gold,' said Yussouf, 'for with thee
Into the desert, never to return,
My one black thought shall ride away from me ;
First-born, for whom by day and night I yearn,
Balanced and just are all of God's decrees ;
Thou art avenged, my first-born ; sleep in peace ! ' [12]

Reader, like poet, will be haunted by the picture of the maiden attended home from a dance, and left at her door holding a candle to light her cavalier, as he drives away down the rainy, dark avenue :

The vision of scarce a moment,
And hardly marked at the time,
It comes unbidden to haunt me,
Like a scrap of ballad-rhyme.

Had she beauty ? Well, not what they call so ;
You may find a thousand as fair ;
And yet there 's her face in my memory
With no special claim to be there.

As I sit sometimes in the twilight,
And call back to life in the coals
Old faces and hopes and fancies
Long buried—good rest to their souls !—

Her face shines out in the embers ;
I see her holding the light,
And hear the crunch of the gravel,
And the sweep of the rain that night.

'Tis a face that can never grow older,
That never can part with its gleam,
'Tis a gracious possession forever—
For is it not all a dream ? [13]

Melody scarcely ever fails him. Often it is so captivating as to tempt us to forget a fine thought in the sweet rhythm, as In the Twilight, where he likens the ghost from Dreamland :

> Of a life lived somewhere, I know not
> In what diviner sphere,
> Of memories that stay not and go not,

to the legend of the origin of the violin's music in the instrument's regrets for old forest voices :

> The secrets of the wind it sings ;
> It hears the April-loosened springs ;
> And mixes with its mood
> All it dreamed when it stood
> In the murmurous pine-wood
> Long ago !
>
> The magical moonlight then
> Steeped every bough and cone ;
> The roar of the brook in the glen
> Came dim from the distance blown ;
> The wind through its glooms sang low,
> And it swayed to and fro
> With delight as it stood
> In the wonderful wood,
> Long ago ![14]

I do not pretend that all, or nearly all, Lowell's verse rises to the heights of inspiration. Too often it is prolix. Much of it again is to be regarded, as I have intimated, less as poetry than, if not skirmishings in a tournament of wit, as a species of journalism in excelsis, or metrical exercises in philosophy. The residuum, however, is undoubted poetry, and of a high order. Born of a rich nature, a passionate soul, it makes hearts to glow, brains to grow ideas. I cannot read it without a shock at the thought that nine out of ten Englishmen well read in the Biglow

Papers, for whom Longfellow is as a compatriot, who even are familiar with the names of Whittier and Bryant, would be amazed to hear of James Russell Lowell as among the world's poets.—Yet he is.

The Poetical Works of James Russell Lowell. Household Edition. Boston: Houghton, Mifflin & Co., 1882.

[1] A Fable for Critics. [2] The Cathedral.
[3] Threnodia (Earlier Poems).
[4] On the Death of a Friend's Child (Miscellaneous Poems).
[5] The Darkened Mind (Under the Willows).
[6] Hunger and Cold (Miscellaneous Poems).
[7] The Forlorn (Earlier Poems).
[8] The Street (Sonnets).
[9] The Shepherd of King Admetus (Miscellaneous Poems).
[10] The Fountain of Youth (Under the Willows).
[11] To the Dandelion (Miscellaneous Poems).
[12] Yussouf (Under the Willows).
[13] An Ember Picture (ibid.).
[14] In the Twilight (ibid.).

EDWARD FITZGERALD

1809—1883

It is at once easy and hard to account for the FitzGerald-Cult. The fervour of many believers in the gospel propounded, 'according to Edward FitzGerald,' by the Persian astronomer-poet, is intelligible enough. The faith is that of Epicurus without the incubus of a philosophical system. None could be simpler, or more cheerfully practised: 'Live your life on earth as if earth, not you, were eternal; as if there were neither Heaven nor Hell. Live for the day, without concern for the morrow; or, if there be a morrow, any more for that than for yesterday. Play, if you can find no better diversion, with whatever theories or dogmas, religious or otherwise, you please. Never, at all events, allow them to colour or cloud your fleeting moments. Your active business is to take advantage of the pleasures of the body, while you have a body. Especially, enjoy music and drinking; if in a garden of roses, with a fair companion, so much the better. Therein lies all your duty, which is only to yourself.' Never was a more unethereally agreeable creed preached. But many of FitzGerald's readers who abhor Omar Khayyám's philosophy enthusiastically appreciate the verse: and it is much less difficult to explain acceptance of the one than why the other satisfies to the point of rapture.

FitzGerald interpolated into the laborious indolence he loved a bare modicum of poetical work. Of the pieces directly original the most important is Bredfield Hall. The description of the home of successive squires of his race is deliciously simple:

Lo, an English mansion founded
  In the elder James's reign,
Quaint and stately, and surrounded
  With a pastoral domain.

With well-timber'd lawn and gardens,
  And with many a pleasant mead,
Skirted by the lofty coverts
  Where the hare and pheasant feed.

Flank'd it is with goodly stables,
  Shelter'd by coeval trees;
So it lifts its honest gables
  Toward the distant German seas;

Where it once discern'd the smoke
  Of old sea-battles far away;
Saw victorious Nelson's topmasts
  Anchoring in Hollesley Bay.

But whatever storm might riot,
  Cannon roar, and trumpet ring,
Still amid these meadows quiet
  Did the yearly violet spring;

Still Heaven's starry hand suspended
  That light balance of the dew,
That each night on earth descended,
  And each morning rose anew;

And the ancient house stood rearing
  Undisturb'd her chimneys high,
And her gilded vanes still veering
  Toward each quarter of the sky:

While like wave to wave succeeding
  Through the world of joy and strife,
Household after household speeding
  Handed on the torch of life.

Here they lived, and here they greeted,
  Maids and matrons, sons and sires,
Wandering in its walks, or seated
  Round its hospitable fires;

Till the Bell that not in vain
  Had summon'd them to weekly prayer,
Call'd them one by one again
  To the church—and left them there!

They, with all their loves and passions,
  Compliment, and song, and jest,
Politics, and sports, and fashions,
  Merged in everlasting rest!

So they pass—while thou, old Mansion,
  Markest with unalter'd face
How like the foliage of thy summers
  Race of man succeeds to race.

To most thou stand'st a record sad,
  But all the sunshine of the year
Could not make thy aspect glad
  To one whose youth is buried here,

In thine ancient rooms and gardens
  Buried—and his own no more
Than the youth of those old owners,
  Dead two centuries before.

Unto him the fields around thee
  Darken with the days gone by;
O'er the solemn woods that bound thee
  Ancient sunsets seem to die.

Sighs the selfsame breeze of morning
  Through the cypress, as of old;
Ever at the Spring's returning
  One same crocus breaks the mould.

. . . . . .

Yet the secret worm ne'er ceases,
  Nor the mouse behind the wall;
Heart of oak will come to pieces,
  And farewell to Bredfield Hall![1]

In general he preferred to track and develop other imaginations, in the way of 'Translation, Paraphrase, or Metaphrase'. Thus he printed versions of six of Calderon's

plays, and of three Greek tragedies, Oedipus, at Thebes, and in Attica, and Agamemnon. He added one of Virgil's garden, and renderings of Omar Khayyám's Rubáiyát, and Jaimi's Salaman and Abjal. All testify to unsparing pains and an extraordinary gift in him for imagining himself into his author. At times we might almost say that he was the author: as in the tale by the Argive Chorus in the Agamemnon, 'taken from Aeschylus,' of the use by Fate of the passions of Gods and Men to accomplish its dread decrees.

That magnificent Ode laid a spell upon me when long ago I came upon it: and the charm works still:

> Soon or late sardonic Fate
> With Man against himself conspires;
> Puts on the mask of his desires:
> Up the steps of Time elate
> Leads him blinded with his pride,
> And gathering as he goes along
> The fuel of his suicide:
> Until having topt the pyre
> Which Destiny permits no higher,
> Ambition sets himself on fire;
> In conflagration like the crime
> Conspicuous through the world and time,
> Down amidst his brazen walls
> The accumulated Idol falls
> To shapeless ashes; Demigod
> Under the vulgar hoof down-trod
> Whose neck he trod on; not an eye
> To weep his fall, nor lip to sigh
> For him a prayer; or, if there were,
> No God to listen, or reply.

The children have to pay for the sin of the father, and sire for the guilt of son:

> Thus with old Priam, with his royal line,
> Kindred and people; yea, the very towers
> They crouch'd in, built by masonry divine.[2]

Then, at the thought of the home desolated by Helen's flight, the stately approval of the fateful doom upon crime and its abettors becomes a flood of sorrowing sympathy with the injured :

Like a dream through sleep she glided
  Through the silent city gate,
By a guilty Hermes guided
On the feather'd feet of Theft ;
Leaving between those she left
And those she fled to lighted discord,
  Unextinguishable Hate ;
Leaving him whom least she should,
Menelaus brave and good,
Scarce believing in the mutter'd
Rumour, in the worse than utter'd
  Omen of the wailing maidens,
Of the shaken hoary head :
Of deserted board and bed.
  For the phantom of the lost one
Haunts him in the wonted places ;
Hall and Chamber, which he paces
Hither, Thither, listening, looking,
  Phantom-like himself alone ;
Till he comes to loathe the faces
Of the marble mute Colossi,
  God-like Forms, and half-divine,
  Founders of the Royal line,
Who with all unalter'd quiet
Witness all and make no sign.
But the silence of the chambers,
  And the shaken hoary head,
And the voices of the mourning
Women, and of ocean wailing,
Over which with unavailing
Arms he reaches, as to hail
The phantom of a flying sail—
  All but answer, Fled ! fled ! fled !
  False ! dishonour'd ! worse than dead !

Night at last; he dreams; and She

> Once more in more than bridal beauty stands;
> But, ever as he reaches forth his hands,
> Slips from them back into the viewless deep,
> On those soft silent wings that walk the ways of sleep.[3]

The Rubáiyát, however, is that by which FitzGerald lives, and will live. It we have to search in order to discover the secret of the poet's fame. The first feeling, when readers have leisure to review impressions, is of surprise at the indifference to the question of the translator's fidelity. It is a matter of complete unimportance to us whether it be a translation at all. At the same time all of us, however absolutely ignorant of Persian, are confident that, if it be, it is perfect in spirit, 'divinely done,' 'a planet equal to the sun which cast it,' as Tennyson, much too flatteringly at any rate to Omar, sums it up.[4] We are too entirely dominated by a consciousness of force, comprehensiveness, will, sufficiency, to be disposed to question FitzGerald's right to deal as with his own.

The mere language, in its elastic strength as of steel, seems to have been created to make a weapon of an agnosticism indistinguishable from dogmatism. Every fresh article in the indictment against one or another of the seventy-two emulous religions of the world cuts with the keenness of Sultan Saladin's sword. FitzGerald, though no follower in his own most simple regimen of Omar Khayyám's philosophy of the senses, was resolved to do his tenets justice. He is scrupulous to marshal them in all their heterodoxical effrontery, with a challenge to orthodoxy in any positive form to do better. The vigour with which the gauntlet is hurled is tremendous: and the defiance is set off with the utmost charms of rhythm. The texture is a model of poetic joinery. Everywhere, in every detail,

the reader is aware of exact, infallible workmanship. The combination of measured uniformity in melody with an effect of continual variety is amazing. There is no staleness, no monotony. At the close of each stanza we are impatient for the next: we are wondering what new tone is to burst from the cell of the last. The ear listens eagerly for ebb and flow, which, scarcely expecting, it expects, craves, and rejoices to welcome back. As the Argument unwinds itself, the rhythm constantly envelops, adapts itself to, each successive evolution and convolution.

For the all but matchless stanzas, the seventeenth to the twentieth, the metre becomes as musically melancholy as if it had been devised for the mourning of Thammuz:

> Whether at Naishápúr or Babylon,
> Whether the cup with sweet or bitter run,
> The Wine of Life keeps oozing drop by drop,
> The Leaves of Life keep falling one by one.
>
> Each Morn a thousand Roses brings, you say;
> Yes, but where leaves the Rose of Yesterday?
> And this first Summer month that brings the Rose
> Shall take Jamshýd and Kaikobád away.

Then:

> Think, in this battered Caravanserai,
> Whose Portals are alternate Night and Day,
> How Sultân after Sultân with his Pomp
> Abode his destined Hour, and went his way.
>
> They say the Lion and the Lizard keep
> The Courts where Jamshýd gloried and drank deep
> And Bahrám, that great Hunter—the Wild Ass
> Stamps o'er his Head, but cannot break his Sleep.
>
> I sometimes think that never blows so red
> The Rose as where some buried Caesar bled;
> That every Hyacinth the Garden wears
> Dropt in her Lap from some once lovely Head.

And this reviving Herb whose tender green
Fledges the River-Lip on which we lean—
  Ah! lean upon it lightly! for who knows
From what once lovely Lip it springs unseen!

Ah, my Belovéd, fill the Cup that clears
To-Day of past Regrets and Future Fears:
  To-morrow! Why, To-morrow I may be
Myself with Yesterday's Sev'n thousand Years.

For some we loved, the loveliest and the best
That from his Vintage rolling Time hath prest,
  Have drunk their Cup a Round or two before,
And one by one crept silently to rest.

And we, that now make merry in the Room
They left, and Summer dresses in new bloom,
  Ourselves must we beneath the Couch of Earth
Descend—ourselves to make a Couch—for whom? [5]

The Sage declares he had struggled against the conviction of the mortality of everything earthly:

Myself when young did eagerly frequent
Doctor and Saint, and heard great argument
  About it and about; but evermore
Came out by the same door where in I went.

With them the seed of Wisdom did I sow,
And with mine own hand wrought to make it grow;
  And this was all the Harvest that I reap'd—
'I came like Water, and like Wind I go.' [6]

He had asked for evidence, whether of the senses, or spiritual, against the tragic conclusion; and in vain:

Strange, is it not? that of the myriads who
Before us pass'd the door of Darkness through,
  Not one returns to tell us of the Road,
Which to discover we must travel too.[7]

We are nothing, he concludes at last, but Shapes of Clay, and reason as would they in their Pottery, if endowed with speech:

Said one among them—'Surely not in vain
My substance of the common Earth was ta'en
And to this Figure moulded, to be broke,
Or trampled back to shapeless Earth again.'

Then said a Second—'Ne'er a peevish Boy
Would break the Bowl from which he drank in joy;
And He that with His hand the Vessel made
Will surely not in after Wrath destroy.'

After a momentary silence spake
Some Vessel of a more ungainly Make;
'They sneer at me for leaning all awry:
What! did the Hand then of the Potter shake?'

Whereat some one of the loquacious Lot—
I think a Súfi pipkin—waxing hot—
'All this of Pot and Potter—Tell me then,
Who is the Potter, pray, and who the Pot?' [8]

The breadth and grasp of thought, the Protean grace of the harmony, have their several shares in the fascination the handful of verse exerts. But such merits do not solve the problem of its astonishing degree, though the full answer will include their co-operation as agents. It is the personality of the Man, a real Man, which explains the extraordinary rank the poem has asserted for itself in literature, and, unfortunately, though, I am persuaded, without FitzGerald's intention, partly in society itself. A poet's own character is always a main condition of the place to be assigned to him: and here we find a genuine Edward FitzGerald everywhere, except on the title-page. It is a manly, adequate presence always. Real as were the versifiers we signify under the name of Omar Khayyám, they do not equal FitzGerald in realness for us. He is not the less real to us that in his lifetime the one quality he

managed for the most part to hide was his intellectual ascendancy. He moved in the narrowest of orbits, not disdaining intimacy with his posthumous father-in-law, the Quaker, banker, and hymn-writer, worthy Bernard Barton. Always he cared less for admiration than for affection, which he prized, while he seemed to slight. Few even of his familiars, perhaps not Tennyson himself, notwithstanding the dedication, could have guessed that he was secure of immortality on Parnassus. He never fretted at the non-recognition of his genius.

For the world no man of letters could have been more obscure. Of the bulk of his doings in literature it remains serenely unconscious still. His anonymous version of Omar's reputed musings itself, it refused to take at his own final valuation of a penny piece. A quarter of a century after the original publication in 1859, the Encyclopaedia Britannica, in a list of editions of the Rubáiyát, refers to his as just 'a portion of the same rendered in English verse by E. Fitzgerald'.[9] The coldness of literary opinion, while he lived, struck his sense of humour rather than of resentment. It never occurred to him to complain. His interest was in his work for the time being—as much in a plodding verification of the Field of Naseby, as in the inspired interpretation of a 'golden Eastern lay'.[10] So long as he felt he had done his part thoroughly, and to the best of his powers, he was sovereignly content.

So lived 'Old Fitz': and so he died: to have the minutest, half-legendary scrapings of his character lit up in the grave with a blaze of renown. Nor without reason, as I sincerely think; though I have been exposing myself, I know, to condemnation, alike, for exaggerated praise of the verse, by persons never touched with the rapture of the Englished Rubáiyát as mere harmony, and by votaries

of the doctrines, for having minimized their merits out of theological or moral bigotry.

Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám, the Astronomer—Poet of Persia. Rendered into English Verse. Macmillan & Co., 1900.

Agamemnon—A Tragedy: Taken from Aeschylus. Bernard Quaritch, 1876.

Letters and Literary Remains of Edward FitzGerald, ed. W. A. Wright. Macmillan & Co., 1889.

[1] Bredfield Hall (Letters and Literary Remains).
[2] Agamemnon, Chorus 4–5. [3] Ibid., Chorus 6–7.
[4] To E. Fitzgerald (Tiresias and Other Poems, 1885).
[5] Rubáiyát, stanzas 8–9 and 17–23.
[6] Ibid., stanzas 27–8. [7] Ibid., st. 64.
[8] Ibid., stanzas 84–7.
[9] Encyc. Brit., ed. ix, vol. xviii, 1884. Art. Omar Khayyám (H.E.).
[10] Vide supra, Tennyson to Fitzgerald (Tiresias, &c.).

COVENTRY PATMORE

1823—1896

As I read Coventry Patmore, I wonder if there be not a secret religion among educated women. Man would have no right to be surprised if they kept in their boudoirs, their schoolroom desks, their wardrobes, along with Jane Eyre and The Christian Year, copies of The Angel in the House, and Victories of Love. Before they go down in the morning, while they dress for dinner, after or before their evening prayer, they might well find time for a few verses, if not for a book. May there not be ladies' clubs at which he is regularly studied, Girton Extension lectures at which he is expounded? When men praise their Milton, Wordsworth, Browning, Tennyson, do they never hear Patmore's name whispered by feminine lips? True that he is seldom mentioned openly, and now less often than thirty years ago. It may merely be another proof of the adage that half of us know nothing of the way in which the other half live. I find it hard to credit that the one real poet who proclaimed the right divine of women to be adored no less after than before marriage, and more so as wives and mothers than as brides, has ceased to be habitually revered by their sex. Poetesses do not count, besides that they rarely are genuine woman-lovers. Until Coventry Patmore poets had been wont to end their worship as soon as the Altar steps were reached. As he boasts, it was reserved for him, last of all, to sing the first of themes.

He traces it in a series of soft-sweet idylls, very fully from the wooing to the wedding-ring, and thence, in outline, rather shadowy, through happy years of nuptial and parental love. The husband-lover prays to be inspired as chronicler :

> Thou, Primal Love, who grantest wings
> And voices to the woodland birds,
> Grant me the power of saying things
> Too simple and too sweet for words.[1]

His verse sufficiently proves that his petition was granted. With charming delicacy he describes the discovery, in Honoria Churchill—playing

> The Wedding March of Mendelssohn—[2]

of the girl whom he had known as a child six years before ; the revelation to himself of his passion through a passing tremor at the thought of a possible rival ; and its elevating effect :

> Whatever in her sight I'd seem
> I'd really be ; I'd never blend
> With my delight in her a dream
> 'Twould change her cheek to comprehend.[3]

Were his affection to be unreturned, he would be proud of it still :

> If fate Love's dear ambition mar,
> And load his breast with hopeless pain,
> And seem to blot out sun and star,
> Love, lost or won, is countless gain ;
> His sorrow boasts a secret bliss
> Which sorrow of itself beguiles,
> And Love in tears too noble is
> For pity, save of Love in smiles.[4]

For him it envelops the universe : spreading, in the eyes

of the sleepless watcher, uncertain as yet of the issue of his suit, a grim pallor at dawn over

> The landscape, all made sharp and clear
> By stillness, as a face by death.[5]

A little later: the blessed answer has been given; and the same landscape is transfigured:

> 'Twas when the spousal time of May
> Hangs all the hedge with bridal wreaths,
> And air 's so sweet the bosom gay
> Gives thanks for every breath it breathes;
> That I, in whom the sweet time wrought,
> Lay stretch'd within a lonely glade,
> Abandon'd to delicious thought
> Beneath the softly twinkling shade.
> The leaves, all stirring, mimick'd well
> A neighbouring rush of rivers cold,
> And, as the sun or shadow fell,
> So these were green and those were gold;
> In dim recesses hyacinths droop'd,
> And breadths of primrose lit the air,
> Which, wandering through the woodland, stoop'd
> And gather'd perfumes here and there;
> Upon the spray the squirrel swung,
> And careless songsters, six or seven,
> Sang lofty songs the leaves among,
> Fit for their only listener, Heaven.[6]

If there could be a drawback to the wooer's own ecstasy, it was caused by its completeness:

> She answering, own'd that she lov'd too.

The avowal overwhelmed the victor with compassion, even shame, at his lady paramount's abdication of her throne:

> By that consenting scared and shock'd,
> Such change came o'er her mien and mood
> That I felt startled and half mock'd
> At winning what I had not woo'd.

My queen was crouching at my side,
By love unscepter'd and brought low,
Her awful garb of maiden pride
All melted into tears like snow.
Her soul, which late I loved to invest
With pity for my poor desert,
Buried its face within my breast,
Like a pet fawn by hunters hurt.[7]

My extracts will, I am afraid, have produced an impression that Coventry Patmore, like other minstrels of love, found, notwithstanding his protestations, a readier subject in the wooing than in wifehood. Whatever his design, that is true in fact of The Angel in the House; though even there lovely rays play over the

Sweet stranger, whom I called my wife;

showing

How light the touches are that kiss
The music from the chords of life.[8]

But the recorder would have been false to his own plan and principle had he closed his history with the wedding, or even the honeymoon. Naturally he should have continued it to and within the poet-bridegroom's pleasant house of The Hurst. He chose instead—more the pity—to assign the leading matrimonial parts in Victories of Love to a cousin, and undeclared adorer, of the heroine of the earlier volume—Frederick Graham—and his wife Jane, whom he had married to deaden a tormenting memory and regret.

Though the second poem shares the general fate of sequels as a whole, it has virtues of its own, and at all events was, in default of Honoria for sole heroine, a necessity. In The Angel in the House the wife was a goddess born. She remains, if in the background, a goddess in Victories of Love, with her husband for vowed and loyal worshipper. The other, with none such in her train, least

of all, her bridegroom, first becomes beautified for him by maternity, as with penitent astonishment he avows :

> When the new-made Mother smiled,
> She seemed herself a little child,
> Dwelling at large beyond the law
> By which, till then, I judged and saw,
> And that fond glow, which she felt stir
> For it, suffused my heart for her ;
> To whom, from the weak babe, and thence
> To me, an influent innocence,
> Happy, reparative of life,
> Came, and she was indeed my wife,
> As there, lovely with love, she lay.[9]

It is a further stage when he discovers Jane, in the companionship of Honoria—the object of his early idolatry—transformed into a Divinity herself. One step still onward ; and wife's, mother's, goddess's love, that had never tired or fainted, turns back the current of time, devotion, and passion, to the steps of the marriage Altar itself ; and, in the dead woman's written legacy of triumph,

> Death, which takes me from his side,
> Shows me, in very deed, his bride ![10]

Alas, fond wretch !

We pass from gentle fluency in Victories of Love to the strangest of wild labyrinths of fancy ministering to theology, in The Unknown Eros. Patmore's entreaty was far from granted if he were serious in beseeching Urania to inspire him with

> Chants as of a lonely thrush's throat
> At latest eve,
> That does in each calm note
> Both joy and grieve ;
> Notes few and strong and fine,
> Gilt with sweet day's decline,
> And sad with promise of a different sun.[11]

But, in compensation, the whole is full of grand spasms of tragic emotion; possibly, of allegories as elaborate as in The Purple Island; certainly, of enigmas, which I could not wish to be a thought, a throb, plainer. I am content with the beauty, if fevered, which is indisputable.

What a cry of protesting, unavailing anguish is the Departure!

It was not like your great and gracious ways!
Do you, that have nought other to lament,
Never, my Love, repent
Of how, that July afternoon,
You went,
With sudden, unintelligible phrase,
And frighten'd eye,
Upon your journey of so many days,
Without a single kiss, or a goodbye?
I knew indeed that you were parting soon;
And so we sate, within the low sun's rays,
You whispering to me, for your voice was weak,
Your harrowing praise.
Well, it was well,
To hear you such things speak,
And I could tell
What made your eyes a growing gloom of love,
As a warm South-wind sombres a March grove,
And it was like your great and gracious ways
To turn your talk on daily things, my Dear,
Lifting the luminous, pathetic lash
To let the laughter flash,
Whilst I drew near,
Because you spoke so low that I could scarcely hear.
But all at once to leave me at the last,
More at the wonder than the loss aghast,
With huddled, unintelligible phrase,
And frighten'd eye,
And go your journey of all days
With not one kiss, or a goodbye,
And the only loveless look the look with which you pass'd;
'Twas all unlike your great and gracious ways.[12]

If aught could be as pathetically, affectionately cruel as what—though it may have an inner and metaphysically theological meaning—reads like a wife's plot to spare her husband the agony of a farewell on the brink of an open grave, it is his charge that the mercy had been treason to love. His wakeful nights are harassed by recollections of his Love's presentiments; by the bitter thought that he ought to have recognized in them a warning, however useless, of the impending blow:

> 'If I were dead,' you'd sometimes say, 'Poor Child!'
> The dear lips quiver'd as they spake,
> And the tears brake
> From eyes which, not to grieve me, brightly smiled.
> And did you think, when you so cried and smiled,
> How I, in lonely nights, should lie awake,
> And of those words your full avengers make?
> 'Poor Child, poor Child!' [13]

Then, when he falls asleep, comes, to heighten, blacken, the grief of bereavement, a recurrent nightmare, in which:

> I thee, in mortal sorrow, still pursue
> Thro' sordid streets and lanes
> And houses brown and bare
> And many a haggard stair
> Ochrous with ancient stains;
> But ever, at the last, my way I win
> To where, with perfectly sad patience nurst
> By sorry comfort of assured worst,
> Ingrain'd in fretted cheek and lips that pine,
> On pallet poor
> Thou lyest, stricken sick,
> Beyond love's cure,
> By all the world's neglect, but chiefly mine.[14]

And yet another dream—dream on dream—by the open window, outside which climbed an odorous azalea:

Last night the delicate crests of saffron bloom
Were just at point to burst.
At dawn I dream'd, O God, that she was dead,
And groaned aloud upon my wretched bed,
And waked, ah, God, and did not waken her,
But lay, with eyes still closed,
Perfectly bless'd in the delicious sphere
By which I knew so well that she was near,
My heart to speechless thankfulness composed.
Till 'gan to stir
A dizzy somewhat in my troubled head—
It was the azalea's breath, and she was dead!
The warm night had the lingering buds disclosed,
And I had fall'n asleep with to my breast
A chance-found letter press'd
In which she said,
'So till to-morrow eve, my Own, adieu!
Parting 's well paid with soon again to meet,
Soon in your arms to feel so small and sweet,
Sweet to myself that am so sweet to you!' [15]

With a fine instinct the half-orphaned, more than half-orphaned, because motherless, child is introduced, to point the desolation of the home. The lonely boy's self-comforting is as painful as, in The Departure, Eurydice, and The Azalea, the husband's heart-void;

My little Son, who look'd from thoughtful eyes
And moved and spoke in quiet grown-up wise,
Having my law the seventh time disobey'd,
I struck him, and dismiss'd
With hard words and unkiss'd,
His Mother, who was patient, being dead.
Then, fearing lest his grief should hinder sleep,
I visited his bed,
But found him slumbering deep,
With darken'd eyelids, and their lashes yet
From his late sobbing wet.
And I, with moan,
Kissing away his tears, left others of my own;

For, on a table drawn beside his head,
He had put, within his reach,
A box of counters, and a red-vein'd stone,
A piece of glass, abraded by the beach,
And six or seven shells,
A bottle with bluebells,
And two French copper coins, ranged there with careful art,
To comfort his sad heart.
So when that night I pray'd
To God, I wept, and said:
Ah, when at last we lie with tranced breath,
Not vexing thee in death,
And Thou rememberest of what toys
We made our joys,
How weakly understood,
Thy great commanded good.
Then, fatherly not less
Than I whom Thou hast moulded from the clay,
Thou'lt leave Thy wrath, and say,
' "I will be sorry for their childishness." ' [16]

The succession of the entire volume to The Angel in the House, with its quiet, limpid grace, almost gaiety, and to the almost tameness of Victories of Love, is among the curiosities of poetical literature. I can discover no literary affinity between this and either of the earlier works. Did not the history of poetry furnish many examples of exotic growths in established reputations, it would be hard to understand the phenomenon. A bright reasonableness, amusing itself with passion, is the distinctive note of Coventry Patmore's previous love-dramas. His type of womanhood never loses her balance—is such,

even at its brightest play,
That her mirth was like the sunshine in the closing of the day.[17]

In grief and adversity her emotions would have been as discreetly ordered; and in weal and woe the hero must

have matched her. Not to speak of Jane and Frederick, no beings could be imagined less likely than Honoria and Felix Vaughan to toss to and fro the thunderbolts of Eros.

Obviously it is vain to attempt to link the two sets of stories and their characters. Any clues seeming to lead in that direction soon break in the hand. The utmost which can be asserted is the existence of a pair of situations, or, rather, trains of feeling, with a relation between them, more of opposition than resemblance. The Angel in the House is a picture of human love, of the purest that earth can offer. Being of earth it is mortal; and The Unknown Eros may exhibit the end of such in disease and death, in conjugal despair, and an orphan's desolation. By the side is a second picture: of another love; widowed, orphaned too; as passionate, yet immortal, and triumphant in the midst of sorrow and abasement; a persecuted Church.

An analogy is traceable, if barely, between the wreck of love in Tennyson's Maud, raving into madness, healed by a Berserker fit, and Patmore's idolatry of home, flaming in its ruins into a rapture of Catholic mysticism. At all events, The Unknown Eros marks such a revolution in the poet. There was, as he does not deny, a struggle before he wandered far from his old

> Crystal-flowing source.[18]

For an instant indeed there may have been an impulse to turn back. Amelia,[19] in its lodging within the precincts of the furnace of Eros, is a breath of pious, simple tenderness; as too is the exquisite picture of the Virgin-Mother adoring at once Deity and Infancy:

> All Mothers worship little feet,
> And kiss the very ground they've trod;
> But, ah, thy little Baby sweet
> Who was indeed thy God![20]

But the attraction of the light which

Shone from the solitary peak at Edgbaston,[21]

was too strong. Patmore's Muse learnt to speak

A language dead.[22]

Instead of putting words to a Wedding March of Mendelssohn, she sang henceforth of Deliciae Sapientiae de Amore [23] and Auras of Delight.[24]

Hearth and home lost their most sympathetic minstrel; poetry, I think, has gained. Patmore's earlier verse is clear and sparkling. Often it has charm. Where it is lacking is in strength, impetus. He discovered that he had a gospel to preach, a message to deliver; and the belief transformed him. The advent of a new faith was as if a fountain of inspiration—bitter waters and sweet—had suddenly welled up within. The flood is perturbed and angry; but it carries away. Any who desire to know what power, fire, Patmore had in him, must study not so much The Angel in the House as The Unknown Eros.

Poems by Coventry Patmore: vol. iii, Victories of Love; vol. iv, The Unknown Eros. George Bell & Sons (no date).

The Unknown Eros, by Coventry Patmore. Third Edition. G. Bell & Sons, 1890.

[1] The Angel in the House: Preludes, 5, The Impossibility.
[2] Ibid., Cathedral Close, 2.
[3] Ibid., The Morning Call, 3.
[4] Ibid., Preludes, 2.
[5] Ibid., Going to Church, 1.
[6] Ibid., The Revulsion, 1.
[7] Ibid., The Abdication, 4, 5.
[8] Ibid., Husband and Wife, 1.
[9] Victories of Love, From Frederick.
[10] Ibid., From Jane to Mrs. Graham.
[11] The Unknown Eros, Proem.
[12] Ibid., 8, Departure.
[13] Ibid., 14, 'If I were Dead.'
[14] Ibid., 9, Eurydice.
[15] Ibid., 7, The Azalea.
[16] Ibid., 10, The Toys.

[17] The Portrait (p. 139, Florilegium Amantis, ed. Rich. Garnett. G. Bell, 1879).

[18] The Unknown Eros, Proem.

[19] Ibid., Amelia.

[20] Ibid., Regina Cœli, p. 194 (Third Edition, 1890, one vol. G. Bell & Sons).

[21] Ibid., Book II, 4, The Standards.

[22] Ibid., Book II, 18, Dead Language.

[23] Ibid., XXVIII, Deliciae Sapientiae de Amore.

[24] Ibid., XLI, Auras of Delight.

DANTE GABRIEL ROSSETTI

1828—1882

THERE are readers who like their poets unmixed—poets only, not philanthropists or misanthropists, theologians or sceptics, metaphysicians or biologists, wits, satirists, humorists, as well. Rossetti was made to suit them. Just and noble sentiments adorn his verse. Its scenery could have been represented only by a painter of genius, a thoughtful observer of nature. Allusions continually testify to the student both of men and of books. The things are, however, where they are solely to serve the demands of the poet's art. He is poet in every line, every turn of a phrase, in the modelling of every cadence. In a piece of a hundred and eighty stanzas I find but one which is prosaic. He might have seemed of a nature too finely constituted, too subtle, too exclusive, for a ballad writer. Whatever instinct, perhaps weariness of the sole companionship of his own emotions, the craving for an appeal to wider sympathies, turned his Muse in that direction, as poet he accepted freely its obligations. Being the thorough artist he was, the most fastidious of writers became plain, rough, and brusque ; the faultlessly metrical versifier stumbled in half rhymes. It can plainly be discerned that the uncouthness, the irregularities, are as intentional as they are popularly effective. I believe that the White Ship, the King's Tragedy, weird Rose Mary itself—Beryl Songs and all—would at a Penny Reading be sure of cheers and tears, even of comprehension, if partial, from the humblest audience. The Three rank among the

foremost of their frankly popular class in English verse; and they are the work of one of the most aesthetic of poets.

Take the first; and trace how, under cover of a story fitted to captivate a peasant, a mechanic, a child, as fine a web of thought and feeling is worked as could have been spun for a study in brain-work. Lawless licence is duly chastised in Knight and damsel, but as the climax of a most intricate game of cross purposes. Out of a mother's beautiful pride in a daughter's imagined purity:

> Mary mine that art Mary's rose,

is hammered an engine at once to pierce the guilty heart, and to slay its betrayer. The lover who would have lived if loyal, dies for his faithlessness. The Beryl-stone itself, in all its brilliancy, perishes for its perfidious complicity with devils.

The magical jewel reflected the future in its gleaming depths, but to none but a pure maid. It had been read by the girl in her childhood. She was to read it now, at her mother's dictate, to learn on which road an ambush might be laid to take the life of her affianced lover, Sir James of Heronhaye, as he rode to be shriven at Holy Cross. She dared not tell her mother that she fulfilled the fated condition no longer:

> Pale Rose Mary sank to the floor:—
> 'The night will come if the day is o'er!'
> 'Nay, heaven takes counsel, star with star,
> And help shall reach your heart from afar:
> A bride you'll be, as a maid you are.'
>
> The lady unbound her jewelled zone
> And drew from her robe the Beryl-stone.
> Shaped it was to a shadowy sphere,—
> World of our world, the sun's compeer,
> That bears and buries the toiling year.

With shuddering light 'twas stirred and strewn,
Like the cloud-nest of the wading moon;
Freaked it was as the bubble's ball,
Rainbow-hued through a misty pall,
Like the middle light of the waterfall.

The lady upheld the wondrous thing:—
'Ill fare,' she said, 'with a fiend's-fairing;
But Moslem blood poured forth like wine
Can hallow Hell 'neath the Sacred Sign;
And my lord brought this from Palestine.

Spirits who fear the Blessed Rood
Drove forth the accursed multitude
That heathen worship housed herein,—
Never again such home to win,
Save only by a Christian's sin.'

Low spake maiden Rose Mary:—
'O mother mine, if I should not see!'
'Nay, daughter, cover your face no more,
But bend love's heart to the hidden lore,
And you shall see now as heretofore.'[1]

She gazes, and perceives by the broken water-gate armed men, as watching for their prey, with the Warden of Holycleugh, Sir James's sworn foe, at their head. All elsewhere is clear; except that, of seven hill-clefts on the road to Holycleugh's castle-steep, the seventh is 'brimmed with mist'. The mother ceases to fear:

'Small hope, my girl, for a helm to hide
In mists that cling to a wild moorside:
Soon they melt with the wind and sun,
And scarce would wait such deeds to be done:
God send their snares be the worst to shun.'[2]

The vision had passed; and as the Lady, content, wraps the stone close in her silken robe,

a music rained through the room:
Low it splashed like a sweet star-spray,
And sobbed like tears at the heart of May,
And died as laughter dies away.[3]

The knight was warned, and shunned the road by the water-gate—yet he died !—

> 'Daughter, daughter, remember you
> That cloud in the hills by Holycleugh ?
> 'Twas a Hell-screen hiding truth away :
> There, not i' the vale, the ambush lay,
> And thence was the dead borne home to-day.' [4]

The perjured wooer ! Secretly pledged to the Warden's sister of Holycleugh, he had been on his way to concert his near marriage with her, when her wrathful brother waylaid him in the misty neighbouring hollow, and avenged both himself and Rose Mary ! The whole is an example, worked out with extraordinary subtlety, of poetical, which happens to be coincident with moral, justice.

The White Ship, again, at first sight simply a tale for wandering minstrels, has for Rossetti its especial motive, an inner core of pathos. Without the two spiritual incidents of the Prince's affection, and the Pilot's refusal of life, I do not suppose it would have had him for chronicler :

> A song,—nay, a shriek that rent the sky,
> That leaped o'er the deep !—the grievous cry
> Of three hundred living that now must die.
>
> An instant shriek that sprang to the shock
> As the ship's keel felt the sunken rock.
>
> A moment the pilot's senses spin,—
> The next he snatched the Prince 'mid the din,
> Cut the boat loose, and the youth leaped in.
>
> Out of the churn of the choking ship,
> Which the gulf grapples and the waves strip,
> They struck with the strained oars' flash and dip.
>
> 'Twas then o'er the splitting bulwarks' brim
> The Prince's sister screamed to him.

He knew her face, and he heard her cry,
And he said, 'Put back! she must not die!'

And back with the current's force they reel
Like a leaf that's drawn to a water-wheel.

Low the poor ship leaned on the tide:
O'er the naked keel as she best might glide,
The sister toiled to the brother's side.

He reached an oar to her from below,
And stiffened his arms to clutch her so.

But now from the ship some spied the boat,
And 'Saved!' was the cry from many a throat.

And down to the boat they leaped and fell:
It turned as a bucket turns in a well,
And nothing was there but the surge and swell.

The Prince that was and the King to come,
There in an instant gone to his doom.

He was a Prince of lust and pride;
He showed no grace till the hour he died.

When he should be king, he oft would vow,
He'd yoke the peasant to his own plough.
O'er him the ships score their furrows now.

God only knows where his soul did wake,
But I saw him die for his sister's sake.[5]

To the mainyard, rent from the mast, two, Berold, the butcher's son of Rouen, and Godefroy de l'Aigle, were clinging, when

lo! a third man rose o'er the wave,
And we said, 'Thank God! us three may He save!'

He clutched to the yard with panting stare,
And we looked and knew Fitz-Stephen there.

He clung, and 'What of the Prince?' quoth he.
'Lost, lost!' we cried. He cried, 'Woe on me!'
And loosed his hold, and sank through the sea.[6]

I do not venture to require, as a right, of The King's Tragedy any explanation of its choice other than the fascination of the prolonged horror itself. We feel the awe of the suspense, before the assassins had returned for a further search after the king's hiding-place to the room tenanted now only by heroic Catherine Douglas, helpless from the torture of her shattered arm :

> Through the open door
> The night-wind wailed round the empty room,
> And the rushes shook on the floor.
>
> And the bed drooped low in the dark recess
> Whence the arras was rent away ;
> And the firelight still shone over the space
> Where our hidden secret lay.
>
> And the rain had ceased, and the moonbeams lit
> The window high in the wall,—
> Bright beams that on the plank that I knew
> Through the painted pane did fall,
> And gleamed with the splendour of Scotland's crown
> And shield armorial.
>
> But then a great wind swept up the skies,
> And the climbing moon fell back ;
> And the royal blazon fled from the floor,
> And nought remained on its track ;
> And high in the darkened window-pane
> The shield and the crown were black.[7]

The murder-scene is depicted with the merciless fidelity of an artist's eye. Even in bloodier-red glares the relentlessness of sweet Queen Jane to the assassins of her unburied husband :

> The month of March wore on apace ;
> And now fresh couriers fared
> Still from the country of the Wild Scots
> With news of the traitors snared.

And evermore as I brought her word,
She bent to her dead king James,
And in the cold ear with fire-drawn breath
She spoke the traitors' names.

But when the name of Sir Robert Graeme
Was the one she had to give,
I ran to hold her up from the floor;
For the froth was on her lips, and sore
I feared that she could not live.

And now of their dooms dread tidings came,
And of torments fierce and dire;
And nought she spake,—she had ceased to speak,—
But her eyes were a soul on fire.

But when I told her the bitter end
Of the stern and just award,
She leaned o'er the bier, and thrice three times
She kissed the lips of her lord.

And then she said,—'My King, they are dead!'
And she knelt on the chapel floor,
And whispered low with a strange proud smile,—
'James, James, they suffered more!' [8]

It was the joy of vengeance; and the poet seems to share it. Yet I suspect that he had been thinking more of the singer of the King's Quair than of the crowned reformer of wrong, the administrator of even justice to high and low; less of the Avenger of treason against her royal consort than of her who from the time when first she was wedded, oft would sigh:

'To be born a king!'
And oft along the way
When she saw the homely lovers pass,
She has said, 'alack the day!'— [9]

whose farewell cry over her slain husband-lover was:

'Alas for the woeful thing,
That a poet true and a friend of man,
In desperate days of bale and ban,
Should needs be born a king!' [10]

Meanwhile, alike here, and in Rose Mary and The White Ship, far apart as may be the theme's secret attraction for the writer, all the time on has swung the action, bleak, and bold, and bare, to the inevitable catastrophe!

Rossetti, being an artist in words, as he was in colours, having set himself to write ballads, observed the law of their composition. He made the framework simple and strong. Within the bold outline, being also a connoisseur of mental problems, he searched for and found occasion for inserting a delicate tracery of spiritual suggestion. The sonnet was a much more natural vehicle for the play of his imagination; and he needed no excuses there. It is no point of honour of a sonnet to be popular; and his are not. A sonnet-writer commonly does not write under a sudden impulse. He does not sing because he must. Deliberately, almost in cold blood, he sits down to his mosaic-work. His productions are addressed to a limited circle; often in appearance, though less often in fact, to an individual; seldom, if ever, to the public. Some spiritual force, doubtless, though not operating directly, will have worked upon him to versify after this kind. To wing it, necessarily, inspiration is wanted no less than art. Imperative as are the laws of the sonnet, it needs, in order to be tolerable, and perhaps more urgently than other departments of poetry, real poetic fire. Nothing is more odiously dreary than a sonnet perfect in form which is not a poem in spirit. The glory of Rossetti's sonnets is that all have the glow of feeling in them, and that, in several, it is the essence.

Sonnet-building was in his blood. The rapture of Dante-worship constituted it his profession. From his models in the Vita Nuova, and the cycle of the Master's harbingers and companions, he learnt how to extract the utmost music from the jangling of the curious under-vesture of shackles. His inimitable translations show his skill. Particularly admirable in his original work is the series he entitled The House of Life. In it, with a hand comparatively free, he constructs, brick by brick, to be overlaid with a marble coating, a temple of Love. I confess the marvel of the masonry; in each segment the interdependence at once, and independence, with final unity. Over and above all blows an air of refreshing spontaneity. They to whom the rigours of the metre, especially in a chain with a hundred links, are distasteful, may find a pleasant surprise in The House of Life. They will, I think, acknowledge that it has proved it possible, if by no means a thing of course, for a sonnet to be a poem also.

Unfair as it always is to tear away members of a series, I am compelled by the laws of space to offer specimens only:

On this sweet bank your head thrice sweet and dear
  I lay, and spread your hair on either side,
  And see the newborn wood flowers bashful-eyed
Look through the golden tresses here and there.
On these debateable borders of the year
  Spring's foot half falters; scarce she yet may know
  The leafless blackthorn blossom from the snow;
And through her bowers the wind's way still is clear.

But April's sun strikes down the glades to-day;
  So shut your eyes upturned, and feel my kiss
Creep, as the Spring now thrills through every spray,
  Up your warm throat to your warm lips; for this
  Is even the hour of Love's sworn suit-service,
With whom cold hearts are counted cast-away.[11]

Add, for the contrast of a more serious note :

> The lost days of my life until to-day,
> What were they, could I see them on the street
> Lie as they fell ? Would they be ears of wheat
> Sown once for food but trodden into clay ?
> Or golden coins squandered and still to pay ?
> Or drops of blood dabbling the guilty feet ?
> Or such spilt water as in dreams must cheat
> The undying throats of Hell, athirst alway ?
>
> I do not see them here ; but after death
> God knows I know the faces I shall see,
> Each one a murdered self, with low last breath :
> ' I am thyself,—what hast thou done to me ? '
> ' And I—and I—thyself,'—lo ! each one saith,—
> ' And thou thyself to all eternity ! ' [12]

The volume of Ballads and Sonnets contains little or nothing imperfect. The rest of the general collection of poems is not liable to that somewhat invidious praise. Among its contents are pieces beautiful only to a few—of whom I myself am not one—and there are pieces which must, I should suppose, be beautiful to all ; for example, the lines, Sudden Light, on that phase of second sight which shadows the past from the present :

> I have been here before,
> But when or how I cannot tell ;
> I know the grass beyond the door,
> The sweet keen smell,
> The sighing sound, the lights around the shore.
>
> You have been mine before,—
> How long ago I may not know ;
> But just when at that swallow's soar
> Your neck turned so,
> Some veil did fall,—I knew it all of yore.

Has this been thus before?
  And shall not thus time's eddying flight
Still with our lives our love restore
  In death's despite,
And day and night yield one delight once more? [13]

Lovelier still is The Portrait:

This is her portrait as she was:
  It seems a thing to wonder on,
As though mine image in the glass
  Should tarry when myself am gone.
I gaze until she seems to stir,—
Until mine eyes almost aver
  That now, even now, the sweet lips part
  To breathe the words of the sweet heart:—
And yet the earth is over her.

In painting her I shrined her face
  'Mid mystic trees, where light falls in
Hardly at all; a covert place
  Where you might think to find a din
Of doubtful talk, and a live flame
Wandering, and many a shape whose name
  Not itself knoweth, and old dew,
  And your own footsteps meeting you,
And all things going as they came.

A deep dim wood; and there she stands
  As in that wood that day: for so
Was the still movement of her hands
  And such the pure line's gracious flow.
And passing fair the type must seem,
Unknown the presence and the dream.
  'Tis she: though of herself, alas!
  Less than her shadow on the grass,
Or than her image in the stream.

Next day the memories of these things,
  Like leaves through which a bird has flown,
Still vibrated with Love's warm wings;
  Till I must make them all my own
And paint this picture. So, 'twixt ease
Of talk and sweet long silences,
  She stood among the plants in bloom
  At windows of a summer room,
To feign the shadow of the trees.

. . . . . .

Last night at last I could have slept,
  And yet delayed my sleep till dawn,
Still wandering. Then it was I wept;
  For unawares I came upon
Those glades where once she walked with me;
And as I stood there suddenly,
  All wan with traversing the night,
  Upon the desolate verge of light
Yearned loud the iron-bosomed sea.

Even so, where Heaven holds breath and hears
  The beating heart of Love's own breast,—
Where round the secret of all spheres
  All angels lay their wings to rest,—
How shall my soul stand rapt and awed,
When, by the new birth borne abroad
  Throughout the music of the suns,
  It enters in her soul at once,
And knows the silence there for God!

Here with her face doth memory sit
  Meanwhile, and waits the day's decline,
Till other eyes shall look from it,
  Eyes of the spirit's Palestine,
Even than the old gaze tenderer:
While hopes and aims long lost with her
  Stand round her image side by side,
  Like tombs of pilgrims that have died
About the Holy Sepulchre.[14]

Besides beauty, here there is tenderness ; and so far the piece is, for Rossetti, unique. The prevailing want of that property is a natural consequence of the empire over him of one canon and gospel connecting all his many characteristics. From old memories I indicated it when I started. Now that I close the review of my more recent impressions of his poems I find my belief confirmed. More than with Shelley —who was a priest of humanity as well as singer—more even than with Keats—in whom a distinct current of youth's warm blood, unchilled by the shadow of death, is perceptible —the rule with Rossetti is to obey no other master and end than art. While he recognizes the existence of other impulses, aims, and conditions—while he makes use of them himself—he never forgets, or pretends to forget, that for him their object is to serve as poetic material. He shrinks from no sadness, sourness, ugliness, which will widen the compass of his lyre. I do not suppose I am libelling the general educated public if I find in that imperious eclecticism, or aestheticism, a key to his lack at all times of common popular favour. I cannot affect to be surprised when I recollect some of his beautiful monstrosities. After all, it is not an unwholesome instinct which demands of poetry that it shall be life's consecrated minister, sanctifying, purifying, and sweetening. Rossetti the poet recognized no such obligation any more than Rossetti the painter. Accordingly, the poet, like the painter, probably will continue to be worshipped by a sect, and not by a nation.

However, poetry is an independent Kingdom with its own laws. It neither is obliged, nor desires, to be exclusive. Its borders are wide. They have made room for Dryden as for Milton, for Burns as for Cowper, for Byron as for Wordsworth. Well can they contain Rossetti also. Poems

too have a being as well as the poet; and, so long as the language lasts, there are many of his which deserve always to be read, and some which will be.

The Poetical Works of Dante Gabriel Rossetti, ed. by W. M. Rossetti. One vol. Ellis & Elvey, 1891.

(Ballads and Sonnets, by Dante Gabriel Rossetti. Fourth Edition. Ellis & White, 1882.)

(The Early Italian Poets, A. D. 1100–1200–1300. Together with Dante's Vita Nuova, translated by D. G. Rossetti.)

[1] Rose Mary, Part I. [2] Ibid. [3] Ibid.
[4] Ibid., Part II. [5] The White Ship.
[6] Ibid. [7] The King's Tragedy.
[8] Ibid. [9] Ibid. [10] Ibid.
[11] Youth's Spring Tribute (The House of Life—a Sonnet Sequence), No. 14.
[12] Lost Days (ibid.), No. 86. [13] Sudden Light
[14] The Portrait, stanzas 1, 3, 4, 7, 10, 11, 12.

WILLIAM MORRIS

1834—1896

Take from the shelf a book by William Morris, new or old to you; read or re-read in it; and you will be very unwilling to put it down. The field is wide. The volume may be the wondrous quest of the Golden Fleece; the narrative enchants as if Orpheus again were the musician. A saga of the Volsungs may have furnished the theme; and you find charm in a riot of perfidy and slaughter. Or it may be a story from the mythology of Greece; of Perseus, Psyche, Alcestis, Pygmalion, Bellerophon. Yet another volume; and you are arbitrating between fallen Guinevere and her accuser, Sir Gauwaine; sitting with Launcelot, and his remorse, beside King Arthur's tomb; or watching with pure Sir Galahad for the Sangreal. Valiant deeds are described, and shameful or heroic dooms, of Gascon knights and Gascon thieves: torturing options between some sudden end to gay, glorious life, and its continuance with dishonour. The whole area of fancy, history, fable, Morris claims for his own, wherever his genius divines a possibility of foothold. Anywhere on the world-wide heath he roofs-in a house, lighting a fire on the hearth to prove his title. Everywhere you too have been at home with him. You pass out, and forget his existence. It is a riddle very hard to guess why the reader who has gladly warmed his hands by the blaze, so rarely comes back; why, after having given apparently so much of himself to the poet, he carries little or nothing of the poet away.

This is not the manner in which we treat, not merely leaders of the choir of poets, Shakespeare, Milton, Dryden, Pope, Burns, Wordsworth, Byron, Shelley, Browning, Tennyson, but any with a real commission. They are always with us. We have not to hunt for them. They come to meet us ; they seek for us. The reason is that they were born winged, and fly. Morris's stories and ballads, though not wingless, stay by the nest. They cannot live without their native air and earth about them. The special message which he, like other poets, ordained prophets and preachers, had to deliver, was not itself, like many of theirs, of a nature to circulate, vibrating and echoing. His was a gospel of beauty, as was Keats's ; only, Keats cared to dwell, almost to look, on nothing which was not in itself a thing of beauty. Morris saw beauty in everything, and was chained to that he saw by its very bulk. A massacre of Volsungs by Goths, for the Titanic magnitude of the treachery, rejoiced his Muse hardly less than the cruel daring which avenged it. The adultery of a hero's consort and his friend, treason, contrition, ecstasies of piety itself, and abiding heat of love purpled by the crime, painted his canvas with colours as precious to him as the virgin moonlight of Galahad's pilgrimage.

Mark how he revels in the rich medley of the guilty Queen's remorse and longing, as she kneels before the Blessed Rood :

> ' Unless you pardon, what shall I do, Lord,
> But go to hell ? and there see day by day
> Foul deed on deed, hear foulest word on word,
> For ever and ever, such as on the way
>
> To Camelot I heard once from a churl
> That curled me up upon my jennet's neck
> With bitter shame ; how then, Lord, should I curl
> For ages and for ages ? dost thou reck

That I am beautiful, Lord, even as you
  And your dear mother ? why did I forget
You were so beautiful, and good, and true,
  That you loved me so, Guenevere ? O yet
If even I go to hell, I cannot choose
  But love you, Christ, yea, though I cannot keep
From loving Launcelot ; O Christ ! must I lose
  My own heart's love ? see, though I cannot weep,
Yet am I very sorry for my sin ;
  Moreover, Christ, I cannot bear that hell ;
I am most fain to love you, and to win
  A place in heaven some time—I cannot tell—
Speak to me, Christ ! I kiss, kiss, kiss your feet ;
  Ah ! now I weep ! '—
  The maid said, ' By the tomb
He waiteth for you, lady,' coming fleet,
  Not knowing what woe filled up all the room.[1]

He found food for sympathy and delight alike in the dauntless adventurousness of the Argonauts, in Medea's fratricide and lies, and in Jason's ungrateful infidelity. Opportunities were waiting everywhere to reward his insight and industry, whether in reconstructions of a savage feudalism, or in visions of democratic Gardens of Eden to be dotted about the happy wilds of re-afforested, repentant Bloomsbury. Nay, his romance upholstered straight-legged chairs scattered here and there beside pomegranate wall-papers. All appealed to his instinct for picturesque variety, his horror of earthiness and monotony. He stamped himself, his tastes and distastes, visibly and tangibly, on cottages and palaces by the thousand or ten thousand. Spiritually he was audible in volume after volume of admirable verse and prose. Unlike his poet-peers, he did not absorb his subject into himself ; rather, he sought to incorporate himself into it. His aim was to suffuse history and life with the atmosphere of lovely possibilities he

discovered in them. He desired to inspire and invigorate by describing both as he saw them. Strangely enough, the result is not the robust picture of actual things which he may be presumed to have contemplated. Each successive scene floats in a haze of dreamy sunshine, through which the uproar and storm of human passion sound as melodiously unreal to the reader as the echo of past labours to the lotus-eating sailors. Ever in vain the poet raises his protesting battle-cry of the tale he has

> to tell,
> Of the wonderful days a-coming, when all
> Shall be better than well.[2]

Never was Muse readier to re-settle Past, Present, and Future. A chief bar to her success in attracting colonists is the requisition she makes upon them of abundant leisure and patience. There are tricks of style which become with repetition trying in the extreme. Such are the habit of inveterate refrains, and a pervading varnish of melancholy which an invariable sweetness does anything but relieve. But, above all, diffuseness is carried to an extent which pays no regard to the brevity of human life. It is the more vexatious that Morris occasionally indicates how he can present a scene in a way to make one catch one's breath. His besetting vice in another shape causes him to steep legends of prehistoric Greece, Norman Sicily, Scandinavian folklore, in one same ointment, fragrant and delightful in itself, but almost repulsive when found to be neither individual, nor native.

Yet even so—what a force the age lost when he died! How utterances of his with all their faults dwell on any memory which has once taken hold of them! It may be a mere exercise in rhythm, like Two Red Roses across the Moon. I read the crazy ballad the other day; and the

feeling with which I had heard it recited by an Oxford friend, shortly after its publication, at once came back. The jingle of it had stayed with me unforgotten for fifty years, and unforgettable :

There was a lady lived in a hall,
Large her eyes, and slim and tall ;
And ever she sung from noon to noon,
'Two red roses across the moon.'

There was a Knight came riding by
In early spring, when the roads were dry ;
And he heard that lady sing at the noon,
'Two red roses across the moon.'

Yet none the more he stopp'd at all,
But he rode a-gallop past the hall ;
And left that lady singing at noon,
'Two red roses across the moon.'

Because, forsooth, the battle was set,
And the scarlet and blue had got to be met,
He rode on the spur till the next warm noon ;—
'Two red roses across the moon.'

That was the battle-cry he raised ; and before it and his gold armour down went the scarlet and blue. Returning as victor, this time he halts at the hall and the lady :

Under the may she stoop'd to the crown,
All was gold, there was nothing of brown ;
And the horns blew up in the hall at noon,
'Two red roses across the moon.' [3]

In higher sorts there is, for example, the resolve of Volsung Signy to die Queen, still, of the abhorred Goths, in the flames of racial vengeance upon them, which she had herself caused to be kindled in her Goth Consort's palace. The strange evidence of fidelity to the letter of the bond she was betraying must not be permitted to founder

along with its grand but water-logged epic. She had planned the destruction, and had come forth to exult with her brother Sigmund and her son Sinfiotli, in its completeness, but insisted on returning :

'My youth was happy ; but this hour belike is best
Of all the days of my life-tide, that soon shall have an end.
I have come to greet thee, Sigmund, then back again must I wend,
For his bed the Goth-King dighteth ; I have lain therein, time was.'
And indeed as the word she uttereth, high up the red flames flare
To the nether floor of the heavens ; and yet men see them there,
The golden roofs of Siggeir, the hall of the silver door
That the Goths and the Gods had builded to last for ever more.
She said : 'Farewell, my brother, for the earls my candles light,
And I must wend me bedward, lest I lose the flower of night.'
And soft and sweet she kissed him, ere she turned about again,
And a little while was Signy beheld of the eyes of men ;
And as she crossed the threshold, day brightened at her back,
Nor once did she turn her earthward from the reek and the whirling rack,
But fair in the fashion of Queens passed on to the heart of the hall.
And then King Siggeir's roof-tree upheaved for its utmost fall,
And its huge walls clashed together, and its mean and lowly things
The fire of death confounded with the tokens of the Kings.[4]

Morris delights, like other poets, in setting riddles ; and many of his are worth guessing, as, for example, A Garden by the Sea :

I know a little garden-close,
Set thick with lily and red rose,
Where I would wander if I might
From dewy morn till dewy night,
And have one with me wandering.
And though within it no birds sing,
And though no pillared house is there,
And though the apple-boughs are bare
Of fruit and blossom, would to God
Her feet upon the green grass trod,
And I beheld them as before.

There comes a murmur from the shore,
And in the close two fair streams are,
Drawn from the purple hills afar,
Drawn down into the restless sea;
Dark hills whose heath-bloom feeds no bee,
Dark shore no ship has ever seen,
Tormented by the billows green
Whose murmur comes unceasingly
Unto the place for which I cry.
For which I cry both day and night,
For which I let slip all delight,
Whereby I grow both deaf and blind,
Careless to win, unskilled to find,
And quick to lose what all men seek.

Yet tottering as I am and weak,
Still have I left a little breath
To seek within the jaws of death
An entrance to that happy place,
To seek the unforgotten face,
Once seen, once kissed, once reft from me
Anigh the murmuring of the sea.[5]

He has, with the poet's gift of mystery, the poet's secret of charm. Both are present in Gunnar's Howe above the House at Lithend.[6] Both, with a deep thought too, underlie, in Mother and Son, a woman's confidences to her infant; spoken that he may imbibe in his spirit what she yearns that he should know, but would blush to tell him when old enough to understand, and, after all, leaves unsaid —perhaps, has not courage to say aloud to herself:

Now sleeps the land of houses,
And dead night holds the street,
And there thou liest 'my baby'
And sleepest soft and sweet.
Lo amidst London I lift thee,
And how little and light thou art,
And thou without hope or fear,
Thou fear and hope of my heart!

Lo here thy body beginning,
O son, and thy soul and thy life;
But how will it be if thou livest,
And enterest into the strife,
And in love we dwell together
When the man is grown in thee,
When thy sweet speech I shall hearken
And yet 'twixt thee and me
Shall rise that wall of distance,
That round each one doth grow,
And maketh it hard and bitter,
Each other's thought to know.

Now, therefore, while yet thou art little
And hast no thought of thine own,
I will tell thee a word of the world;
Of the hope whence thou hast grown;
Of the love that once begat thee,
Of the sorrow that hath made
Thy little heart of hunger,
And thy hands on my bosom laid.
Then mayst thou remember hereafter,
As whiles when people say
All this hath happened before
In the life of another day;
So mayst thou dimly remember
This tale of thy mother's voice,
As oft in the calm of dawning
I have heard the birds rejoice,
As oft I have heard the storm-wind
Go moaning through the wood:
And I knew that earth was speaking,
And the mother's voice was good.[7]

Full of grace, again, is the Praise of My Lady, which the shy lover, like the Mother, dares utter only to the air:

'My lady seems of ivory
Forehead, straight nose, and cheeks that be
Hollow'd a little mournfully.
Beata mea Domina!

Her forehead, over-shadow'd much
By bows of hair, has a wave such
As God was good to make for me.

Not greatly long my lady's hair,
Nor yet with yellow colour fair,
But thick and crisped wonderfully.

Beneath her brows the lids fall slow,
The lashes a clear shadow throw
Where I would wish my lips to be.

I wonder if the lashes long
Are those that do her bright eyes wrong,
For always half tears seem to be

Lurking below the underlid,
Darkening the place where they lie hid—
If they should rise and flow for me!

Her full lips being made to kiss,
Curl'd up and pensive each one is;
This makes me faint to stand and see.

Nay, hold thy peace! for who can tell?
But this at least I know full well,
Her lips are parted longingly,

So passionate and swift to move,
To pluck at any flying love,
That I grow faint to stand and see.

Yea! there beneath them is her chin,
So fine and round, it were a sin
To feel no weaker when I see

God's dealings; for with so much care
And troublous, faint lines wrought in there,
He finishes her face for me.

. . . . . .

All men that see her any time,
I charge you straightly in this rhyme,
What, and wherever you may be,

To kneel before her; as for me,
I choke and grow quite faint to see
My lady moving graciously,
Beata mea Domina!' [8]

But Morris's distinctive strength is that of a story-teller. In a succession of massive volumes—the Life and Death of Jason, and The Earthly Paradise—he revealed even to scholars the wealth of romance embedded in Greek myths and traditions. With a success as surprising he assimilated the Scandinavian spirit for the purpose of dealing with Scandinavian lore. The Defence of Guenevere, and, yet more, King Arthur's Tomb, need not shun comparison with Tennyson's treatment of the Arthurian legend. In isolated ballads on the borderland of history he stands in the first rank among his contemporaries.

As a minstrel he has two manners of relating a tale, and is a master in each. Of set purpose he spins a web for the entanglement of wits in the story of Rapunzel. After the same method the stir and rush of the Haystack in the Floods leave as much to be guessed as is told. Was this to be the end of the dreary flight, from the Chatelet, of Jehane the brown, the beautiful, the reputed witch, attended by her knightly lover; with her other lover, accuser, and witch-catcher, in hot pursuit?—

Had she come all the way for this,
To part at last without a kiss?
Yea, had she borne the dirt and rain
That her own eyes might see him slain
Beside the haystack in the floods? [9]

Or, following his larger way, he will, now, in hundreds of pages tell the tale of the Golden Fleece, or, now, in half a dozen, concerning the King of Denmark's Sons, recount how it all came about:

And Harald reigned and went his way,
'So fair upriseth the rise of the sun.'
And still is the story told to-day,
'So grey is the sea when day is done.' [10]

Histories, legends, songs, philosophies, moralities—they constitute together a vast total, with an astonishing evenness of merit. The several components are, one and all, interesting, and, not seldom, fascinating. Where then is their place in English poetry? My object throughout my rapid review of our Poets has been to determine which of them are among the Immortals—have left us heirs of possessions we cannot do without. Poems of such sort are at once necessaries and treasures; and I have coveted the multiplication of them. When I began my sketch of William Morris, I intimated a fear that his work was not of the kind; and this continues to be my impression. Much in it charms me whenever it places itself under my eyes. I do not long to return to it. A divine spark is wanting. It is not that a star has been hidden in a cellar, as an old and great poet imagined. Such as it is, it has been visible enough. Its orbit has been half a century of energetic modern life. Somehow, I suppose, Morris had to choose between the exercise of a single power, and divers; and he preferred many to much.

The Defence of Guenevere and Other Poems, by William Morris. Ellis & White, 1858. Reprint: Longmans, 1896.

The Story of Sigurd the Volsung, and the Fall of the Niblungs, by William Morris. Ellis & White, 1877.

Poems by the Way, by William Morris. Reeves & Turner, 1891.

[1] King Arthur's Tomb (Defence of Guenevere, &c.), stanzas 41–6.

[2] The Day is Coming (Poems by the Way), st. 1.

[3] Two Red Roses across the Moon (Defence of Guenevere), stanzas 1, 2, 3, 4, 9.

[4] Sigurd the Volsung, Book I.

[5] A Garden by the Sea (Poems by the Way).
[6] Gunnar's Howe above the House at Lithend (ibid.).
[7] Mother and Son (ibid.).
[8] Praise of My Lady (Defence of Guenevere).
[9] The Haystack in the Floods (ibid.), stanzas 1–5.
[10] The King of Denmark's Sons (Poems by the Way).

ALGERNON CHARLES SWINBURNE

1837—1909

In 1897, when this book first appeared, Swinburne was living. By the plan of the work I had debarred myself, therefore, from including him. On the issue of the present edition I could not have passed him over. But it was impossible to pretend to depose Alfred Tennyson from his place as crowning the succession of British poets. I have compromised by disregarding the accidents of birth and death, and seating the newcomer beside William Morris, and Rossetti, his companion, and in some sort his master.

Poets of the first rank never are duplicates. It is impossible to bracket Swinburne with any among his nineteenth-century contemporaries or predecessors. He reminds of Rossetti in sensuousness; he had a far hotter faith in a poet's duty to concern himself with the world and society. With Shelley he may compare in bitter discontent with Earth as it is, with Heaven as it is commonly understood to be; but both for good and ill he was for Shelley too realistic and material. For himself he was entirely devoid of literary jealousy of coevals or seniors. Landor he revered as

> Father and friend.

He extolled and bewailed Robert Browning, owner of

> The clearest eyes in all the world.

Victor Hugo he hymned both in English and French as a king of men as well as bards. All singers, native and foreign, ancient and modern, were equally of his fellowship. He had the courage to render his homage to Catullus in

Etonian Latin. Having finished the Arcadia in a garden one evening, he offers a noble vesper hymn to Sidney in thankfulness for its grace :

> The flowers of the sun that is sunken
> Hang heavy of heart as of head ;
> The bees that have eaten and drunken
> The soul of their sweetness are fled ;
> But a sunflower of song, on whose honey
> My spirit has fed as a bee,
> Makes sunnier than morning was sunny
> The twilight for me.[1]

He had learnt from every one ; he borrowed from none ; not even melody. Read Itylus once, and you will seem to catch an occasional echo of Keats. Re-read, and the sweep, the rush of the rhythm, if less Elizabethan than his, are felt to have too much passion in them for any but himself :

> Sister, my sister, O fleet sweet swallow,
> Thy way is long to the sun and the south ;
> But I, fulfilled of my heart's desire,
> Shedding my song upon height, upon hollow,
> From tawny body and sweet small mouth
> Feed the heart of the night with fire.
>
> I the nightingale all spring through,
> O swallow, sister, O changing swallow,
> All spring through till the spring be done,
> Clothed with the light of the night on the dew,
> Sing while the hours and the wild birds follow,
> Take flight and follow and find the sun.
>
> Sister, my sister, O soft light swallow,
> Though all things feast in the spring's guest-chamber,
> How hast thou heart to be glad thereof yet ?
> For where thou fliest I shall not follow,
> Till life forget, and death remember,
> Till thou remember and I forget.[2]

The full, rich sweetness of The Year of the Rose encourages the same inclination to trace a tone, a thrill, to Keats; we are left with the same final conviction of an essential difference in the music in consequence of an essential distinction in poetic feeling:

> In the red-rose land not a mile
> Of the meadows from stile to stile,
> Of the valleys from stream to stream,
> But the air was a long sweet dream
> And the earth was a sweet wide smile
> Red-mouthed of a goddess, returned
> From the sea which had borne her and burned,
> That with one sweet smile of her mouth
> Looked full on the north as it yearned,
> And the north was more than the south.[3]

Then, again, for qualities going deeper than form, consider Swinburne's choice—all his own—of themes; the temper with which he contemplates humanity, its place in the universe, how circumstances affect it, how it weighs and accepts, or shapes them. He began by viewing life habitually as children observe an eclipse of the sun through smoked glass. In time he outgrew the sheer insolence, as it is, notwithstanding the much of grandeur, in a piece like A Litany. The gloom which distinguished the first series of Poems and Ballads survived, and constantly recurs. There it had been cynical. In the Ballad of Life bodily joys are accumulated to break-in a bondsman in the Ballad of Death for the conqueror:

> Seek out Death's face ere the light altereth,
> And say 'My master that was thrall to Love
> Is become thrall to Death'.[4]

Not satisfied to conduct all the riot of sense into the grave, he fashions from it a nightmare to harass the last sleep:

> The four boards of the coffin lid
> Heard all the dead man did.[5]

He compels Nature to serve Man's desolation by laying waste a garden planted for purposes of human delight :

> Not a flower to be prest of the foot that falls not ;
> As the heart of a dead man the seed-plots are dry ;
> From the thicket of thorns whence the nightingale calls not,
> Could she call, there were never a rose to reply.[6]

Affection itself is for his Muse as ephemeral as a blossom :

> The old year's dead hands are full of their dead flowers,
> The old days are full of dead old loves of ours,
> Born as a rose, and briefer born than she ;
> Couldst thou not watch with me ? [7]

With advancing years the darkness deepens instead of dispersing. The climax is in the third series of Poems and Ballads, The Weary Wedding. For piling up horror, step by step, that might pair with the Scottish ballad of 'Edward ! Edward !' [8]

Melancholy, dainty, sweet, and lovely melancholy, has always been a privilege of poets, from Fletcher to Keats. It bears little resemblance to Swinburne's. His dirges and Litanies are war-cries. With the heart-broken bride's sobs, and the taunts to the rich bridegroom :

> 'O fool, will ye marry the worm for a wife ?
> O fool, will ye marry the dust of death ?'

mingles the man's triumphant insistence to the girl :

> 'Nay, ye are mine while I hold my life.
> Nay, ye are mine, while I have my breath.' [9]

Swinburne exults in passion, and the price paid for it ; in death which is life, and life which is death. He exults in the ruin of the Armada in :

> the fierce July when fleets were scattered as foam,[10]

and England :

Laughed loud to the wind as it gave to her keeping the glories of
Spain and Rome.

His verse becomes a trumpet's blast as it magnifies and warns :

A light that is more than the sunlight, an air that is brighter than
morning's breath,
Clothes England about as the strong sea clasps her, and answers
the word that it saith ;
The word that assures her of life if she change not, and choose not
the ways of death.[11]

He exults in the grace of his type of gleaming Italian hill-towns, which

far to the fair south-westward lightens,
Girdled and sandalled and plumed with flowers,
At sunset over the love-lit lands,
The hill-side's crown where the wild hill brightens,
Saint Fina's town of the Beautiful Towers,
Hailing the sun with a hundred hands.[12]

Eager, audacious, defiant he always was, when in 1866, at the age of twenty-nine, he was flinging wild music in the face of English decorum which he despised as insular prudery ; when, not without pride in the reprobation he had brought down upon himself, he sat himself apart, and uttered his cries against a universe of dust and ashes. Let him, however, for a moment forget, as he could, all but an immensity of sunshine and full broad billows ; and how radiant, jubilant a nature emerges, and soars, singing ! Read the hymn to the south-west wind :

Wind beloved of earth and sky and sea beyond all winds that blow,
Wind whose might in fight was England's on her mightiest warrior
day,
South-west wind, whose breath for her was life, and fire to scourge
her foe,
Steel to smite and death to drive him down an unreturning way,

Well-beloved and welcome, sounding all the clarions of the sky,
Rolling all the marshalled waters towards the charge that storms the shore,
We receive, acclaim, salute thee, we who live and dream and die,
As the mightiest mouth of song that ever spake acclaimed of yore.
We that live as they that perish praise thee, lord of cloud and wave,
Wind of winds, clothed on with darkness whence as lightning light comes forth,
We that know thee strong to guard and smite, to scatter and to save,
We to whom the south-west wind is dear as Athens held the north,
He for her waged war as thou for us against all powers defiant,
Fleets full-fraught with storm from Persia, laden deep with death from Spain;
Thee the giant God of song and battle hailed as God and giant,
Yet not his but ours the land is whence thy praise should ring and rain;
Rain as rapture shed from song, and ring as trumpets blown for battle,
Sound and sing before thee, loud and glad as leaps and sinks the sea;
Yea, the sea's white steeds are curbed and spurred of thee, and pent as cattle,
Yet they laugh with love and pride to live, subdued not save of thee.
Ears that hear thee hear in heaven the sound of widening wings gigantic,
Eyes that see the cloud-lift westward see thy darkening brows divine;
Wings whose measure is the limit of the limitless Atlantic,
Brows that bend, and bid the sovereign sea submit her soul to thine.[13]

Vehemence, passion, are distinctive notes of his genius. He imagines, and instantly accepts, a challenge. On the least pretext he throws down his gauntlet. To find a parallel for the continuity of flame, we must go back—just halting at Shelley—to Marlowe:

a star too sovereign, too superb,
To fade when heaven took fire from Shakespeare's light,
A soul that knew but song's triumphal curb
And love's triumphant bondage, holds of right
His pride of place, who first in place and time
Made England's voice as England's heart sublime.[14]

The tragedies, though least of all, the earliest—Atalanta in Calydon—with the relief of its lovely choruses—labour under the same excess of emotions, and of one in particular. It mars them as dramas, which cannot live without variety, light and shade. They are clogged by mere bulk. Fleets of charming fancies drift helplessly about volumes from two hundred and nineteen to five hundred and thirty-two pages long. But their abiding enemy is monotony of emphasis. From that they are the worst, not the only, sufferers. In no form does the poet's verse escape it. The habit is the more to be regretted that when, as occasionally elsewhere, the chronic tempestuousness abates, the gift of melody remains not the less surpassing that it becomes gentle and reposeful. As, lulled by breeze and waves, he floats :

> I lean my cheek to the cold grey pillow,
> The deep soft swell of the full broad billow,
> And close my eyes for delight past measure,
> And wish the wheel of the world would stand.[15]

And it stands for him, by no means in joy, though not in sorrow altogether, as he watches beside the cradle of a baby dead :

> The little hands that never sought
> Earth's prizes, worthless all as sands,
> What gift has death, God's servant, brought
> The little hands ?
>
> We ask ; but love's self silent stands,
> Love, that lends eyes and wings to thought
> To search where death's dim heaven expands.
>
> Ere this, perchance, though love know nought,
> Flowers fill them, grown in lovelier lands,
> Where hands of guiding angels caught
> The little hands.[16]

He has proved that he could write with no less tenderness,

and more gaiety, about living babyhood. And how he adores heroism and genius—contemporary as well as past! The more the pity that he has not sung sometimes of everyday life, of ordinary manhood and womanhood in a like temper! Amidst the loftiness, the intoxication, the splendour of his panegyrics and maledictions, the intensity of his landscape-drawing, even the grand thoughts which he lavished, I often pine, to my shame, for a cup of cold water, a little sober calm, a ray of common human household kindliness. But, I know, it was not his way, unless for an interlude. Whether in much masterly prose, or in overwhelming verse, a born fighter, he must rank as such; though a generous combatant, as well as a fiery one!

Mr. Swinburne's Poems, referred to below, are published by Messrs. Chatto & Windus.

[1] Sidney's Arcadia (Astrophel), st. 2.

[2] Itylus (Poems and Ballads, 1st Ser.), stanzas 3, 4, 5.

[3] The Year of the Rose (Poems and Ballads, 2nd Ser.), st. 3.

[4] A Ballad of Death (Poems and Ballads, 1st Ser.), st. 11.

[5] After Death (ibid.), st. 1.

[6] A Forsaken Garden (Poems and Ballads, 2nd Ser.), st. 4.

[7] A Wasted Vigil (ibid.), st. 8.

[8] See p. 361, and Percy's Reliques.

[9] The Weary Wedding (Poems and Ballads, 3rd Ser.), last three stanzas.

[10] The Armada (ibid.), II, st. 2.

[11] England: an Ode (Astrophel), st. 20.

[12] Four Songs of Four Seasons: Spring in Tuscany (Poems and Ballads, 2nd Ser.), st 9.

[13] An Autumn Vision (Astrophel), II.

[14] Inscriptions (ibid.), II.

[15] A Swimmer's Dream (ibid.), V, st. 2.

[16] A Baby's Death (A Century of Roundels), III.

ARTHUR HUGH CLOUGH

1819—1861

Poets in general love to preach, and to a congregation. When they soliloquize they choose a market-place. For a very few the primary, if not the final, forum is themselves. Afterwards they may be persuaded to admit the public to their confidence. At the moment of singing they had been honestly unaware of its existence. They resorted to poetry simply because they knew of no better instrument with which to hammer out thoughts vital to their own souls. If the resulting ideas fail to touch other hearts or ears they do not mind. Their disregard of miscellaneous sympathy, the occasional crudity of form, have no common origin with the roughness of a writer who, having studied his art as a violinist studies his, challenges criticism to disentangle the beauty from the excrescences concealing it. These solitaries do not concern themselves with the artistic requirements of the medium of expression they have adopted. They harbour no intention, unless to mould and develop for their own use a conception or an aspiration.

To this limited class of poets who, first and last, are thinkers, Arthur Hugh Clough belongs. Nature, however, endowed him with poetical gifts more or less independent of that specific characteristic. Thus, a peculiarly delicate sense of rhythm distinguished him from the commencement of his career. A River Pool, written when he was twenty-one, has

> a dreamy sound
> Of ripples lightly flung.[1]

Religious poets of the early seventeenth century would not have disdained the harmony of The Music of the World and of the Soul, another product of Clough's early manhood. A felicity, almost a mystery, of tone lifts above the commonplace Songs in Absence, twelve years later in date :

> The billows whiten and the deep seas heave ;
> Fly once again, sweet words, to her I leave,
> With winds that blow return, and seas that swell,
> Farewell, farewell, say once again, farewell.[2]

It lends an additional charm to his song of Endymion on Latmos, which shows also a rare quality with him—warmth, as of a lover :

> Can it be, and can it be ?
> Upon Earth, and here below,
> In the woodland at my side
> Thou art with me, thou art here.
> 'Twas the vapour of the perfume
> Of the presence that should be,
> That enwrapt me !
> That enwraps us,
> O my Goddess, O my Queen !
> And I turn
> At thy feet to fall before thee ;
> And thou wilt not :
> At thy feet to kneel and reach and kiss thy finger-tips ;
> And thou wilt not ;
> And I feel thine arms that stay me,
> And I feel—
> O mine own, mine own, mine own,
> I am thine, and thou art mine ![3]

Dipsychus's accompaniment to the gliding of the gondola —not to speak of the graver significance of the phantasy—is the poetry of motion—very Venice :

> How light we go, how soft we skim !
> And all in moonlight seem to swim.

In moonlight is it now, or shade ?
In planes of sure division made,
By angles sharp of palace walls
The clear light and the shadow falls ;
O sight of glory, sight of wonder !
Seen, a pictorial portent, under,
O great Rialto, the vast round
Of thy thrice-solid arch profound !—
How light we go, how softly ! Ah,
Life should be as the gondola ! [4]

Something even more, from the suggestion of aching regret, is the musical flow of the herd-girl's hastening cry to her cows :

The skies have sunk, and hid the upper snow—
Home, Rose, and home, Provence and La Palie—
The rainy clouds are falling fast below,
And wet will be the path, and wet shall we—
Home, Rose, and home, Provence and La Palie !

Ah dear, and where is he, a year agone,
Who stepped beside and cheered us on and on ?
My sweetheart wanders far away from me,
In foreign land, or on a foreign sea—
Home, Rose, and home, Provence and La Palie ! [5]

He had other qualities besides, marking a poet ; and at the opening of life he won the rank at a stroke, with The Bothie of Tober-na-Vuolich. There could be no more vivid description of a typical Highland scene than that of the students' bathing-place :

There is a stream
Springing far off from a loch unexplored in the folds of great mountains,
Falling two miles through rowan and stunted alder, enveloped
Then for four more in a forest of pine, where broad and ample
Spreads, to convey it, the glen with heathery slopes on both sides ;

Broad and fair the stream, with occasional falls and narrows;
But, where the glen of its course approaches the vale of the river,
Met and blocked by a huge interposing mass of granite,
Scarce by a channel deep-cut, raging up, and raging onward,
Forces its flood through a passage so narrow a lady would step it.
There, across the great rocky wharves, a wooden bridge goes,
Carrying a path to the forest; below, three hundred yards, say,
Lower in level some twenty-five feet, through flats of shingle,
Stepping-stones and a cart-track cross in the open valley.
But in the interval here the boiling pent-up water
Frees itself by a final descent, attaining a basin,
Ten feet wide and eighteen long, with whiteness and fury
Occupied partly, but mostly pellucid, pure, a mirror;
Beautiful there for the colour derived from green rocks under;
Beautiful, most of all, where beads of foam uprising
Mingle their clouds of white with the delicate hue of the stillness,
Cliff over cliff for its sides, with rowan and pendent birch boughs,
Here it lies, unthought of above at the bridge and pathway,
Still more enclosed from below by wood and rocky projection.
You are shut in, left alone with yourself and perfection of water,
Hid on all sides, left alone with yourself and the goddess of bathing.[6]

A Long Vacation party's humours were never better touched-off. We hear the learned Tutor's grave dissertations; for instance, on nature's objections to equality:

Star is not equal to star, nor blossom the same as blossom;
There is a glory of daisies, a glory again of carnations;
Were the carnation wise, in gay parterre by green-house,
Should it decline to accept the nurture the gardener gives it,
Should it refuse to expand to sun and genial summer,
Simply because the field-daisy that grows in the grass-plat beside it,
Cannot, for some cause or other, develop and be a carnation?
Would not the daisy itself petition its scrupulous neighbour?
'Up, grow, bloom, and forget me; be beautiful even to proudness,
E'en for the sake of myself, and other poor daisies like me.'[7]

Contemporaries were able, and amused, to follow the gay banter of his pupils among themselves, not extraordinarily witty, any more than their sage instructor's philosophy

is particularly convincing, but curiously diverting; the playing at reading and at love-making; the hospitalities of chieftains and local noblemen, when Oxford undergraduates were still novelties in the North. The whole carried the public taste by storm. Hope of Ilay, Lindsay the Piper, Poet and Chartist Hewson, 'Arthur' Audley, and the great Hobbes,

Contemplative, corpulent, witty,

became household words. Even the metre, odious from other pens, was accepted smilingly from Clough—hexameters in deshabille.

There he and his world were in entire unison. That his Muse possessed more than ordinary gifts, had he chosen to use them, for continuing to draw it in her train, is evident from Peschiera, and the applause which greeted it:

You say, 'Since so it is,—good-bye
Sweet life, high hope; but whatsoe'er
May be, or must, no tongue shall dare
To tell, "The Lombard feared to die!"'

Ah! not for idle hatred, not
For honour, fame, nor self-applause,
But for the glory of the cause,
You did, what will not be forgot.

And though the stranger stand, 'tis true,
By force and fortune's right he stands;
By fortune which is in God's hands,
And strength, which yet shall spring in you.

This voice did on my spirit fall,
Peschiera, when thy bridge I crost,
''Tis better to have fought and lost,
Than never to have fought at all!' [8]

It and the sister lyric, carrying a step onward the same heroic thought, that brave and bloody failures in a holy

cause are never wasted, fell from the first on no deaf ears. They were a real contribution to the ultimate renovation of a nationality:

Say not, the struggle nought availeth,
The labour and the wounds are vain,
The enemy faints not, nor faileth,
And as things have been they remain.

If hopes were dupes, fears may be liars;
It may be, in yon smoke concealed,
Your comrades chase e'en now the fliers,
And, but for you, possess the field.

For while the tired waves, vainly breaking,
Seem here no painful inch to gain,
Far back, through creeks and inlets making,
Comes silent, flooding in, the main.

And not by eastern windows only,
When daylight comes, comes in the light,
In front, the sun climbs slow, how slowly,
But westward, look, the land is bright.[9]

A spirit easily and nobly catching fire, an eye for scenic picturesqueness, and character-sketching, and an ear for melody, go far towards making a poet by vocation. He had those faculties, and more in the same direction. In some of his latest verse he acknowledged the sort of obligation such properties seem to impose. Had a constant supply of fuel, in a crusade as righteous, been available, it is conceivable that literature might have been enriched with many more 'Peschieras' from his pen. In the nature of things the condition was not likely to be fulfilled. The competition of other yearnings of his inmost soul must in any case have been ceaseless and distracting. From the beginning the mere singing instinct in him had to fight a mortal, a losing battle against the claim of doubt, moral, religious, intellectual, to his spirit's absolute

service. His youth was cast in a time of mental and spiritual questionings, active especially among pupils of Arnold. Perilously as they disturbed the great teacher's own son, singing kept on the whole with him its independence. His friend, his Thyrsis, had a less imperious imagination or a more restlessly and unselfishly logical conscience. From an early period the poetic instinct in him became primarily an instrument for embodying, fixing, if only for a time, his shadowings of existence, present, past, and future, of the government of the Universe, of Infinity. Verse became his means for expressing the conflict in his soul between scepticism and mysticism.

At moments the songster in him would rise and carol. It was only as it were by an accident. Really he was more his proper self even in unsatisfying Easter Day Odes—'Christ not Risen', yet 'Risen'—'The Questioning Spirit'—'Bethesda'[10]—than in the music of the Swiss girl's cattle-call. Most of all was he himself in a moving, if unhopeful, cry, such as Parting:

O tell me, friends, while yet ye hear,—
May it not be, some coming year,
These ancient paths that here divide
Shall yet again run side by side,
And you from there, and I from here,
All on a sudden reappear?
O tell me, friends, while yet ye hear!

O tell me, friends, ye hardly hear,—
And if indeed ye did, I fear
Ye would not say, ye would not speak,—
Are you so strong, am I so weak,
And yet, how much soe'er I yearn,
Can I not follow, nor you turn?
O tell me, friends, ye hardly hear![11]—

or in the solemn chant of an appeal against dogmatizing on the Unknowable ?

O Thou, in that mysterious shrine
Enthroned, as I must say, divine !
I will not frame one thought of what
Thou mayest either be or not.
I will not prate of ' thus ' and ' so ',
And be profane with ' yes ' and ' no ',
Enough that in our soul and heart
Thou, whatsoe'er Thou may'st be, art.

Unseen, secure in that high shrine
Acknowledged present and divine,
I will not ask some upper air,
Some future day to place Thee there ;
Nor say, nor yet deny, such men
And women saw Thee thus and then :
Thy name was such, and there or here
To him or her Thou didst appear.

Do only Thou in that dim shrine,
Unknown or known, remain, divine ;
There, or if not, at least in eyes
That scan the fact that round them lies,
The hand to sway, the judgment guide,
In sight and sense, Thyself divide :
Be Thou but there,—in soul and heart,
I will not ask to feel Thou art.[12]

Whether at all, or how far, he succeeded in discovering a clue to the problems he handles—whether he might not, by passing them by, have had a brighter career, and been happier personally, is a question no stranger can answer with assurance. To me he never appears to have felt that out of all his self-interrogatings he had pioneered a via media. Certainly the gospel he preached to himself made few converts outside. With the exceptions of The Bothie and Peschiera with its companion, his poems were as little heeded in his lifetime. They are, with the same exceptions,

less read now. He himself did not mind, and would not mind. He did not seek for the fame either of poet or of prophet. Never could it have occurred to him to be disappointed that it did not, and has not, come. The English public takes small pleasure in philosophical poetry, unless an extraordinary harmony be inspired by an earthy self-love like Omar Khayyám's; and Arthur Clough's melody and philosophy are not thus inspired. Meanwhile, he wanders about Victorian literature like a phantom. Sometimes, however, phantoms become as much forces as are substances; and hereafter it may happen to be so with him. It is in truth difficult to believe that a spirit so gracious, so eager to learn as well as teach, so original, so reverent, so open-minded, so penetrating in its insight, with a personality so interesting, so star-like, so generously hot against injustice and tyranny—and against them alone—can actually be as faint in its influence as the deadness of popular attention to the works it permeates would seem to prove.

Poems by Arthur Hugh Clough. With a Memoir. Sixth Edition. Macmillan & Co., 1878.

[1] A River Pool (Early Poems).

[2] Songs in Absence, st. 4.

[3] *ἐπὶ Λάτμῳ* (Early Poems).

[4] Dipsychus (published after Clough's death), Part II, Sc. 2.

[5] Ite domum saturae (Miscellaneous Poems), stanzas 1–2.

[6] The Bothie of Tober-na-Vuolich, 3.

[7] Ibid., 2. [8] Peschiera (Miscellaneous Poems), stanzas 8, 9, 10.

[9] Say Not (ibid.).

[10] Easter Day (Naples, 1849) (Religious Poems). Easter Day, II. The Questioning Spirit (Poems on Life and Duty). Bethesda, a Sequel (ibid.).

[11] Parting (Early Poems), stanzas 3–4.

[12] *ὔμνος ἄνυμνος* (Religious Poems), stanzas 3–5.

MATTHEW ARNOLD

1822—1888

I HAVE no ghoulish taste for visiting charnel-houses ; but the whole Escurial is more of a tomb than a palace. There it seemed natural to descend into the royal vaults. Not among the Monarchs, where her Consort was to lie, but in an ante-chamber was the coffin of his loved and lost young Montpensier Queen and Bride. Not for her to rest with Sovereigns ; for she had left no child to reign. Matthew Arnold established no dynasty, annexed no province of poetry ; so, I dare say, he must repose for the present not with, though beside, the Kings of Song.

Gladly I believe that he will be crowned in his grave by posterity ; for I myself account him worthy. As it is, he is a king de jure rather than de facto. I cannot deny that the reading public has not yet pronounced for his enthronement. If I may modify the metaphor as to dignities, I would say that he has been Beatified, not for the present Sanctified. His poetry is not of a kind to be spontaneously popular. It is a scholar's poetry, with the drawback of being not so much over-learned as over-educational. It is free from eccentricity, grotesqueness, rhetoric ; and its freedom has operated in its disfavour. It makes no effort to amuse with story-telling, history, or burlesque. The singer kept an abundant store of humour, if full of gall, for his brilliant prose. None diversifies his poetry, unless it be discoverable in the ten-years' ineffectual wooing of blue-eyed, pale, and angelically grave Marguerite by the ' gleam-

lighted lake', and on the Terrace at Berne. Though the sin of monotony cannot be charged against his verse, not many keys are touched. Such as sound are all solemn and austere. Then, no Matthew-Arnold-Cult has arisen. No congregation, however minute, of reverent disciples gathers together in his name. Persons of refinement admire. They nurse the emotion in their own breasts. They fear to vulgarize it by publishing it abroad. The controversial fame which he acquired in the concluding stages of his career has itself in a way acted adversely. The sentiment of his essays was, though in the bitter without the sweet, akin to that of his verse. In latter days his poetry often appeared to be regarded as an appendage to his essays rather than they to it.

Of the limitations, in fact, to his popularity there can be no question. They were necessary results of his whole habit of mind. He had an excessive tendency towards considering the poet a preacher, towards chanting homilies on the low aims and pursuits of modern society, its tinsel, its earthiness. He laid himself open to the reproach of parading as a discoverer of the hollowness of life. He was proud of being, through his honesty, a homeless wanderer forlorn from the hearth of orthodoxy. Sometimes he philosophized when he ought to have been singing. Often his thoughts pressed forward so eagerly as to threaten to stifle one another. Not merely are his poems unrelieved by a single flash of gaiety; they are not lighted by a sparkle of joy. Lastly, and most detrimentally, he insisted upon, perhaps could not help, mixing the work of the critical with that of the creative faculty. He would sit in judgement upon the purity of his own inspiration; upon the quantity of candle-power of the tongues of fire as they alighted upon him. One and all are heavy fetters upon fancy; and as

such the general, even the instructed, public has always felt them.

For an intimate circle they enhance respect for the powers which can burst through such obstacles. The drawbacks are for it the exalting defects of his Muse's qualities. Had he not deviated into preaching, we should, it will urge, have lost the heroic dirge of Rugby Chapel. No appeal, in Christ's name, would have been raised in Progress for sympathy with whatever Faith regenerates. Had he not been apt to confound philosophizing and singing, we might have been spared the cross-grained meditations of Empedocles, but should have missed the lovely interludes on the harp of Callicles. Three-fourths of The Buried Life are psychology rather than poetry; but without them we had lost the music of the close—the sudden pause in life's distracted turmoil:

> When our world-deafen'd ear
> Is by the tones of a lov'd voice caress'd—
> A bolt is shot back somewhere in our breast,
> And a lost pulse of feeling stirs again,
> The eye sinks inward, and the heart lies plain,
> And what we mean, we say, and what we would we know!
> A man becomes aware of his life's flow,
> And hears its winding murmur, and he sees
> The meadows where it glides, the sun, the breeze,—
> And there arrives a lull in the hot race
> Wherein he doth for ever chase
> That flying and elusive shadow, rest.
> An air of coolness plays upon his face,
> And an unwonted calm pervades his breast.
> And then he thinks he knows
> The hills where his life rose,
> And the sea where it goes.[1]

The Bacchanalia, without the rambling prelude, would

not have danced from the silence of death into the silence of living light :

> And o'er the plain, where the dead age
> Did its now silent warfare wage—
> O'er that wide plain, now wrapt in gloom,
> Where many a splendour finds its tomb,
> Many spent flames and fallen nights—
> The one or two immortal lights
> Rise slowly up into the sky
> To shine there everlastingly,
> Like stars over the bounding hill.
> The epoch ends, the world is still.[2]

Without the vain effort in the Epilogue to Lessing's Laocoön to marshal the arts in their respective ranks, we should have lost the noble tribute to Music :

> 'Miserere, Domine!'
> The words are utter'd, and they flee.
> Deep is their penitential moan,
> Mighty their pathos, but 'tis gone!
> Beethoven takes them then—those two
> Poor, bounded words!—and makes them new ;
> Infinite makes them, makes them young ;
> Transplants them to another tongue,
> Where they can now, without constraint,
> Pour all the soul of their complaint,
> And roll adown a channel large
> The wealth divine they have in charge.
> Page after page of music turn,
> And still they live and still they burn,
> Perennial, passion-fraught, and free—
> 'Miserere, Domine!'[3]

Even when we feel him straining after an idea which evades his grasp, as in The Strayed Reveller, the tendrils of floating fancy cling to a hundred entrancing scenes. Egotistical is he? If any one is a licensed egotist, is not a poet? Weary, worn-out, blasé too, if he please, so long

as the mood gives us melody delightfully acrid, like the final answer to the question, What is it to grow old?

> It is—last stage of all—
> When we are frozen up within, and quite
> The phantom of ourselves,
> To hear the world applaud the hollow ghost
> Which blamed the living man;[4]

like a hail-storm of sadness, as The Last Word:

> Creep into thy narrow bed,
> Creep, and let no more be said.
> Vain thy onset! all stands fast!
> Thou thyself must break at last.
>
> Let the long contention cease!
> Geese are swans, and swans are geese.
> Let them have it how they will!
> Thou art tired: best be still.
>
> They out-talked thee, hiss'd thee, tore thee?
> Better men fared thus before thee!
> Fired their ringing shot, and pass'd,
> Hotly charged—and broke at last.
>
> Charge once more, then, and be dumb!
> Let the victors, when they come,
> When the forts of folly fall,
> Find thy body by the wall![5]

like the exquisite glimpse of Kensington Gardens, caught through the afternoon sunshine of a serene despair:

> Birds here make song, each bird has his,
> Across the girdling city's hum;
> How green under the boughs it is!
> How thick the tremulous sheep-cries come![6]

or the contrast imaged in The Palladium—stately, cold marble, with a flush as from a deity within—between the calm of the soul and the discords of external existence:

It stood, and sun and moonshine rain'd their light
On the pure columns of its glen-built hall.
Backward and forward roll'd the waves of fight
Round Troy; but while this stood, Troy could not fall.

So, in its lovely moonlight, lives the soul!
Mountains surround it, and sweet virgin air;
Cold plashing, past it, crystal waters roll;
We visit it by moments, ah, too rare!

Still doth the soul, from its lone fastness high,
Upon our life a ruling effluence send;
And, when it fails, fight as we will, we die,
And while it lasts, we cannot wholly end.[7]

The drama of man's inner life, as seen by Arnold, is a tragedy in many acts, with many actors. It commences with a struggle; often the player cast for a leading part never sees the end; often it has no end; when there is any, always it is grievous. The bitterness of it all taints Heine's grave in trim Montmartre:

Hark! through the alley resounds
Mocking laughter! A film
Creeps o'er the sunshine; a breeze
Ruffles the warm afternoon,
Saddens my soul with its chill!
Gibing of spirits in scorn
Mars the benignant repose
Of this amiable home of the dead.[8]

It had robbed him living of the source of the one supreme gift as a poet that he missed:

Charm, the glory which makes
Song of the poet divine;[9]

The play's climax may be the catastrophe of a moment, such as froze into eternal despair

that Lord Arundel,
Who struck, in heat, his child he loved so well
And his child's reason flicker'd, and did die.
Painted—he will'd it—in the gallery
They hang; the picture doth the story tell.[10]

Or it may be an unceasing ache, like the never stilled, old world sorrowing of tawny-throated Philomela:

Eternal passion!
Eternal pain![11]

Vainly man seeks to riot himself into forgetfulness of the hollowness of existence, as in the dreary revelry of Mycerinus, whose

sometimes wondering soul
From the loud joyful laughter of his lips
Might shrink half startled, like a guilty man
Who wrestles with his dream.[12]

Equally to no purpose will he plot to circumvent his doom of nothingness, by condemning himself to the grinding weariness of a living death—the Carthusians'

gloom profound,
Ye solemn seats of holy pain![13]

The battle always is lost before it was fought.

A time was when humanity seemed at last to have grasped triumphantly a saving Faith:

Oh, had I lived in that great day,
How had its glory new
Fill'd earth and heaven, and caught away
My ravish'd spirit too!

No thoughts that to the world belong
Had stood against the wave
Of love which set so deep and strong
From Christ's then open grave.

No lonely life had pass'd too slow
When I could hourly see
That wan, nail'd Form, with head droop'd low,
Upon the bitter tree;

Could see the Mother with the Child
Whose tender winning arts
Have to his little arms beguiled
So many wounded hearts!

While we believed, on earth he went,
And open stood his grave;
Men call'd from chamber, church, and tent,
And Christ was by to save.[14]

That untenanted grave, with the vision of Him, who had once lain therein, ascending to his Heaven to prepare it for men, turned many a convulsion of despair, as in the adorable story of the Church of Brou, and its widowed Foundress, into angelic resignation—a resignation outlasting life:

So sleep, for ever sleep, O marble pair!
Or, if ye wake, let it be then, when fair
On the carved western front a flood of light
Streams from the setting sun, and colours bright
Prophets, transfigured Saints, and Martyrs brave
In the vast western window of the nave;
And on the pavement round the tomb there glints
A chequer-work of glowing sapphire tints,
And amethyst, and ruby—then unclose
Your eyelids on the stone where ye repose,
And from your broider'd pillows lift your heads,
And raise you on your cold white marble beds,
And looking down on the warm rosy tints
Which chequer, at your feet, the illumined flints,
Say: 'What is this? We are in bliss—forgiven—
Behold the pavement of the courts of Heaven!'
Or let it be on autumn nights, when rain
Doth rustlingly above your heads complain

On the smooth leaden roof, and on the walls
Shedding her pensive light at intervals
The moon through the clere-story windows shines,
And the wind washes 'mid the mountain pines;
Then, gazing up through the dim pillars high,
The foliaged marble forest where ye lie;
'Hush'—ye will say—'it is eternity!
This is the glimmering verge of Heaven, and these
The columns of the heavenly palaces!'
And in the sweeping of the wind your ear
The passage of the angels' wings will hear,
And on the lichen-crusted leads above
The rustle of the eternal rain of love.[15]

And then—and then—alas for the world and the atoning blood of the Christ of Nazareth!

Now he is dead! Far hence he lies,
In the lorn Syrian town,
And on his grave, with shining eyes,
The Syrian stars look down.[16]

The struggle is over, and a profound quiet succeeds; but scarcely even Balder's 'peace',[17] where there was hope's glimmer, its pale ghost. Rather, the soul-suicide of the silent Alpine monastery, with its frost-bitten Belief, which is, for the world,

a dead time's exploded dream;

rather, the stillness of the tented field, with the opposed Persian and Tartar hosts in unconcerned animal repose, while, between them, in the hushed chill darkness, Sohrab, slain by his father's unknowing spear,

lay dead,
And the great Rustum drew his horseman's cloak
Down o'er his face, and sate by his dead son.[18]

Matthew Arnold constantly dwells on one note. For the

close we always can imagine we hear a delivery of judgement of decay and death. In varying cadences of mournfulness, sobs of protest, recognized by the victim as unavailing, are raised against the inevitable blankness. They are succeeded at best by acquiescence in woe beyond compare, which leaves no more to suffer. What though, throughout the whole, we are sensible of some affectation in the guilty of grief which does not grieve—of some positive, preposterous pride in the remarkable elevation of soul which has elected him to be a remorseful exile from the Kingdom of Faith instead of a common comfortable believer! At all events, artistic values in the picture are intuitively observed; and the painter moreover had actually passed through the spiritual experiences he portrays.

He had interrogated human nature; particularly, his own. He had ransacked libraries; always for his own mind's sake; to discipline, and enrich it; to learn what manner of being he might have been and was not, or was. For him the one thing worth understanding was the complex organism of man's heart and intellect. To know it he used himself as subject, scalpel, and lecturer. His habit of identifying virtually the functions of writer and critic was a necessity of the position he assumed. We can contemplate him dissecting his inner personality, noting how his soul, which originally had glowed with devotion, exulted in the discovery of its liberty—then—

> Wandering between two worlds, one dead,
> The other powerless to be born,[19]

'waited forlorn' in the discord of contrary enthusiasms, harassed by rival claims to allegiance, scared, distracted, seared, benumbed; and, finally, when the company, lost in the storm,

at nightfall, at last
Comes to the end of its way,
To the lonely inn 'mid the rocks ;
Where the gaunt and taciturn host
Stands on the threshold, the wind
Shaking his thin white hairs—
Holds his lantern to scan
The storm-beat figures, and asks :
' Whom in our party we bring ?
Whom we have left in the snow ? ' [20]

was content to let the doubt remain unresolved even by himself, whether he will be of the remnant to whom the question is put. When now and again suspicion arises, as I have said, of a want of genuineness in the anguish, it can be admitted without too much offence to the honour of the sufferer. He is operator, though on himself, and his primary duty was to apply the knife. To find fault with his assumption of the double character is to strike at the basis of his intimate poetry ; and with that we cannot afford to quarrel.

Take him as he is—body at once and anatomist, poet and critic—and study of his work will both inform and delight. Whether he vivisect his own soul, or another's, he himself remains the principal object of interest. The Scholar-Gipsy is a picturesque vision of the legendary being who had doffed the trammelling gown, yet could not tear himself out of hearing of Oxford's sweet jangling bells, among

the warm, green-muffled Cumnor hills.[21]

So is departed Thyrsis, in the sister idyll redolent of the fragrant beauty alike of Lycidas, and the Ode to a Grecian Urn, yet distinct from both. But the final cause of each is to echo Matthew Arnold, and in each we search for and discover him and his moods. Byron himself does not loom

more largely in every poem he wrote than Arnold in his. The more impressive the poet and his verse, the more we feel the critic, the psychologist, analysing, characterizing every tissue, every nerve-centre ; and we admire and sympathize with both the more.

He was born a poet ; and he had trained himself to be a consummate artist in words. Milton in the choruses of Samson Agonistes has not equalled the flexible harmony of the blank verse of Rugby Chapel and Heine's Grave. Tennyson in the Swan's death-song scarcely surpasses Dover Beach in the music of the ebb, and

> Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar.[22]

I am afraid to praise, lest I be accused of exaggeration, the perfect accord of harmony and complaint in the Forsaken Merman's cry of mild hopelessness :

> Children, at midnight,
> When soft the winds blow,
> When clear falls the moonlight,
> When spring-tides are low ;
> When sweet airs come seaward
> From heaths starr'd with broom,
> And high rocks throw mildly
> On the blanch'd sands a gloom ;
> Up the still, glistening beaches,
> Up the creeks we will hie,
> Over banks of bright sea-weed
> The ebb-tide leaves dry.
> We will gaze, from the sand-hills,
> At the white, sleeping town ;
> At the church on the hill-side—
> And then come back down ;
> Singing : 'There dwells a loved one,
> But cruel is she !
> She left lonely for ever,
> The kings of the sea.' [23]

As I read and re-read, I perpetually light upon passages which, like this, would do honour to any genius, however exalted. I can well understand how such a master might have expected to attain to something of the width of celebrity which fell to an illustrious contemporary. But, as constantly, I note personal characteristics which explain at once the disappointment of his hope of common popularity, and the peculiarity of the recognition he won. His was natural inspiration of the highest, which had happened to be exposed to the contradictory influences of Thomas Arnold's Rugby, with its 'cheerful, radiant vigour', and Newman's dissatisfied, self-troubled Oxford. None can tell whether without the blend, or strife, literature would have gained or lost. It might have counted better-matured Sohrab and Rustums. It must have gone without the Grande Chartreuse, the Obermann, Heine, and the Chapel. As it is, the poet has failed of general favour, and has secured an audience all his own. Never has the educated, that is, the Academically educated, section of the community been enveloped in a cloud of incense like this! A poet, an inspired poet, and all for it! Nothing in him of the obscurity of Sordello, which a mere student from London, Manchester, anywhere, is free to penetrate. All clear as the day to glasses burnt on the banks of Isis or Cam. The elect of Oxford and Cambridge can never read a line of Matthew Arnold without a consciousness of his eyes upon them. No wonder that his followers, travel-stained like himself, fellow wanderers, fellow exiles, from the Promised Land, are fit and select—but few.

Poems by Matthew Arnold. Two vols. Macmillans, 1869. (Also Poetical Works, one vol., 1896.)

[1] The Buried Life.

[2] Bacchanalia; or, The New Age.

[3] Epilogue to Lessing's Laocoön.
[4] Growing Old.
[5] The Last Word.
[6] Lines Written in Kensington Gardens.
[7] Palladium, stanzas 2, 3, 6.
[8] Heine's Grave.
[9] Ibid.
[10] A Picture at Newstead.
[11] Philomela.
[12] Mycerinus.
[13] Stanzas from the Grande Chartreuse.
[14] Obermann Once More.
[15] The Church of Brou, 3, The Tomb.
[16] Obermann Once More.
[17] Balder Dead.
[18] Sohrab and Rustum.
[19] Stanzas from the Grande Chartreuse, st. 15.
[20] Rugby Chapel.
[21] The Scholar-Gipsy.
[22] Dover Beach.
[23] The Forsaken Merman.

ROBERT BROWNING

1812—1889

LITERARY history furnishes many examples of prose-writers who have employed their wits and pens in deciphering their own thoughts and emotions. Some among many are Cicero, Marcus Aurelius, St. Augustine, Montaigne, Pascal, Rousseau, Sterne, perhaps Cervantes. We have to search before finding clear parallels in poetry. I do not mean that poets do not habitually light up their own minds for the delight and instruction of the public. That is of the essence of poetry. But they start by looking ahead, by trying to penetrate into other minds, and telling them what they, without knowing it, think. Their discoveries outside they carry within. At their leisure they take their spoil to pieces, repair, add, embellish, reconstruct, and give forth transformed.

Matthew Arnold and Robert Browning are prominent among the Great in English verse for beginning and ending on their own ground. Like all they were ready to gather suggestions from elsewhere. They valued them as mere material for their personal use and enlightenment. So far the two are alike ; and yet none could differ more in the manner of their self-revealing. The one is something between historian and advocate, the other an inspired diarist. The one passionately narrates and comments, passionately apologizes, pleads, and defends. The other remembers, compares, foresees, soliloquizes, and is at once wholly personal, and as absolutely impersonal. A complete

diagram of the working of Browning's mind might be drawn from his many successive volumes. Poets in general regard themselves as apostles commissioned to go out and teach. Being distinctively a poet, with a poet's idiosyncrasies, he did not refuse to let his voice be heard. He would not have denied that he rather preferred it as it sounded to an audience. But for the purpose disciples had to be at home with him. They had to listen, as, with entire dispassionateness, he conversed with himself aloud. His primary object was to tell himself what from day to day he thought. If readers in general did not follow, he might regret it or not. The accident did not lead him to change the form of his memoranda.

With this conception anybody who is sincerely anxious to profit by him has to begin. His way was to be for ever chasing, overtaking, catching at, the shadow of an idea flitting around ; outside, it might be : by choice, within. Having grasped it, he would order, frequently torture, it to declare its substance. When the thing, unaccustomed to be thus rudely catechized, stood mute, he set to work imagining all possible beings it might be. One by one he held them up before it, to see whether they recognized kinsmanship. Often he was left clasping still an inveterately unsubstantial shadow. He had to clothe it with flesh and blood from his own large, warm, breathing, very human soul.

For the public, when at a long last it came to be inquisitive about him, for students and disciples from the first and always, that was the sum of the whole. The very diverse classes of his ultimate readers were content, if at times bewildered, that it should be so. They wandered in the gardens of his spacious nature, surveying it through what were bars for most of them, after the manner of

visitors to the flowers and beasts in Regent's Park. They were interested to watch him whether at play or in earnest. I do not suppose that it was in the least his own point of view. The shadows were all palpable realities to him. If I may change the metaphor, he would not be aware that he had never removed the scaffolding from the buildings he had erected. It might be a complicated human fabric he had constructed out of casuistry, sensuality, love of imposture for its own sake as an art, the bases of the career of a charlatan like Paracelsus. Not a single prop or strut could be removed with safety. In tracking the strange fortunes of an Italian troubadour, warrior, master and victim of statecraft and lovecraft, such as the mysterious half mythological Sordello, of the Purgatorio, he had to retain as tight hold of every clue to the labyrinth as a medieval schoolman. The problems that he kept setting himself, at brief intervals, for upwards of half a century! How deviously he wandered to find fresh enigmas; as, for instance, Which was the true Christopher Smart?[1] The solutions with which he attempted, sometimes successfully, sometimes not, to satisfy himself! The knots deliberately tied to be triumphantly, and as deliberately, loosened!

Poetry in his eyes was the science of life; and life mainly the life of a mind. That was life's essence without the accidents. The one proper instrument for operating upon it was introspection of, and by, the operator; as Matthew Arnold also found, though from a dissimilar point of view, and with recourse to very dissimilar processes. Melody, orthodox melody, Browning allowed, might serve as an auxiliary; its help was not so important that it was worth purchasing by sacrifices. Above all, nothing in an idea, a thought, a feeling, must be resigned in its favour. Poets are alleged to have pared down a thought for the

sake of a rhyme or rhythm. They have been said to be capable of letting a rhyme introduce a thought. Browning would have scorned to give up the least particle of an idea at the demand of diction. He never scrupled to manufacture terms and phrases as clothes for an idea. Rather than suffer rhyme to lead thought, he coined rhymes also. He may seem to be prolix. Again, it is thought which is to blame; some idea will have had to disentangle itself painfully from encumbering matter; or it is growing, and needs additional raiment in the shape of speech. Its parent never dreamt of refusing so natural, necessary, even laudable and decent, a demand.

The Ring and the Book reports in four volumes a criminal trial. That is the poem's outward guise. The reality is a microscopic analysis of the life-beats of a group of hearts. Measure its right to the space not by the crime, not by the hearts, but by the pulsations of the reporter's brain; and there is not a page too many. Voluminous, if not diffuse, rugged and harsh, not careful to render the ideas he supremely prized intelligible—much less, palatable—to the ordinary Englishman, he stands, in the mass of his work, altogether apart both from his contemporaries and his predecessors. With all their variances and contrarieties, the several schools of poetry may be said at least to have agreed as a rule upon a measure of complimentary respect for the understanding of their public. Foremost among the few dissidents stands the author of Sordello, Caliban upon Setebos, Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau, Red Cotton Night-cap Country, Fifine at the Fair, The Inn Album, Jocoseria, Parleyings with Certain People, La Saisiaz, the two Poets of Croisic, and Asolando. No charge can be lodged against him of having pandered to the popular taste, or ignorance.

The complacency with which he launched upon literature this rapid succession of conundrums enraged the contemporaries of two-thirds of his career. He never appeared to be aware of the shocks he was administering. His general uncouthness seemed the more audacious in the face of a store of most tuneful occasional poems with which he interspersed his habitual experiments upon the endurance of readers. At will he showed that, when he chose, none could be more melodious than he. By turns he was gentle and fiery, able to unseal the fountain of laughter and the fountain of tears. He was majestic, terrible, simple, tender—even to imposture, if hungry—content, with a profound thought beneath, to be just graceful. With the sense upon us of the works by which apparently he meant his name to live, we ask, not so much why usually he clashes the harp-strings, as why the psychologist, the metaphysician has suddenly strayed into absolute singing. Was he moved by compassion for the bewildered and dazed critic? Was he himself weary of untunefulness? May it not have been that the music always underlay the philosophy, that the philosophy was always ready, in favouring circumstances, to break into song—that life's 'scowl of cloud' hides behind it

splendid, a star?[2]

I have been glancing through the lyrics scattered over many volumes. It would be hard to say where else can be found a more absolute combination of thought, sentiment, rhythm—or where more variety.

In The Lost Leader I read reproach, amazement, revolt, admiration, hope that he, the renegade, in fighting the followers he has deserted, will keep all the prowess which had won their worship—that he will repent in death—be theirs once more in Heaven—for they love him:

Let him never come back to us!
There would be doubt, hesitation, and pain,
Forced praise on our part—the glimmer of twilight,
Never glad confident morning again!
Best fight on well, for we taught him—strike gallantly,
Menace our heart ere we master his own;
Then let him receive the new knowledge and wait us,
Pardoned in heaven, the first by the throne![3]

Bitter humour in The Soliloquy of a Spanish Cloister blasts hypocrisy hiding under a cowl. The soliloquy is a microcosm. It is an entire play, which sums up the passions of universal humanity, raving in a petty monastery, inside a pettier breast. The joy of setting a trap to catch saintly Brother Lawrence!

There 's a great text in Galatians
Once you trip on it, entails
Twenty-nine distinct damnations,
One sure if another fails;
If I trip him just a-dying,
Sure of heaven as sure can be,
Spin him round, and send him flying
Off to hell, a Manichee![4]

In another spirit, weariness of the yoke of liberty becomes a hymn to a Guardian Angel to 'bend me low', like Guercino's pictured child at Fano:

and lay, like his, my hands together,
And lift them up to pray, and gently tether
Me, as Thy lamb there, with thy garment's spread.[5]

Or defiance is hurled at Death:

Fear death?—to feel the fog in my throat,
The mist in my face,
When the snows begin, and the blasts denote
I am nearing the place,
The power of the night, the press of the storm,
The post of the foe;
Where he stands, the Arch Fear in a visible form,
Yet the strong man must go:

For the journey is done and the summit attained,
And the barriers fall,
Though a battle 's to fight ere the guerdon be gained,
The reward of it all.
I was ever a fighter, so—one fight more,
The best and the last!
I would hate that death bandaged my eyes, and forbore,
And bade me creep past.
No! let me taste the whole of it, fare like my peers
The heroes of old,
Bear the brunt, in a minute pay glad life's arrears
Of pain, darkness, and cold.
For sudden the worst turns the best to the brave,
The black minute 's at end,
And the elements' rage, the fiend-voices that rave,
Shall dwindle, shall blend,
Shall change, shall become first a peace out of pain,
Then a light, then thy breast,
O thou soul of my soul! I shall clasp thee again,
And with God be the rest![6]

And the love-songs! To fit every phase—

Passion, hidden, the lover may believe, from all but the bud the loved one has named:

This flower she stopped at, finger on lip,
Stooped over, in doubt, as settling its claim;
Till she gave me, with pride to make no slip,
Its soft meandering Spanish name:
What a name! Was it love or praise?
Speech half-asleep, or song half-awake?
I must learn Spanish one of these days,
Only for that slow sweet name's sake.

Flower, you Spaniard, look that you grow not,
Stay as you are and be loved for ever!
Bud, if I kiss you, 'tis that you blow not,
Mind, the shut pink mouth opens never!
For while it pouts, her fingers wrestle,
Twinkling the audacious leaves between,
Till round they turn and down they nestle—
Is not the dear mark still to be seen?[7]

A husband's glad choice—when bid fix his own reward for the rescue of France's sole surviving fleet—of one day's company of his wife as sufficient guerdon :

A beam of fun outbroke
On the bearded mouth that spoke,
As the honest heart laughed through
Those frank eyes of Breton blue ;
'Since I needs must say my say,
Since on board the duty 's done,
And from Malo Roads to Croisic Point, what is it but a run ?—
Since 'tis ask and have, I may—
Since the others go ashore—
Come ! A good whole holiday !
Leave to go, and see my wife, whom I call the Belle Aurore ! '
That he asked, and that he got,—nothing more.[8]

A Parting, with seas to divide—and, perhaps, for ever !

Round the cape of a sudden came the sea,
And the sun looked over the mountain's rim ;
And straight was a path of gold for him,
And the need of a world of men for me.[9]

A protest, in the presence of death, against a measurement of the right to love by Time's jealous milestones !—

I loved you, Evelyn, all the while !
My heart seemed full as it could hold—
There was place and to spare for the frank young smile,
And the red young mouth, and the hair's young gold.
So, hush,—I will give you this leaf to keep :
See, I shut it inside the sweet cold hand !
There, that is our secret—go to sleep !
You will wake, and remember, and understand.[10]

And, lastly, a lovely psalm of marriage—By the Fireside—where passion and tenderness blend into one, and transmute the still aching agony of uncertainty in the wooing :

Oh, the little more, and how much it is!
And the little less, and what worlds away!
How a sound shall quicken content to bliss,
Or a breath suspend the blood's best play,
And life be a proof of this!—[11]

into happy pride

To think how little I dreamed it led
To an age so blest that, by its side,
Youth seems the waste instead.[12]

Every lyric, every idyll, has its problem, though merged in an undercurrent of melody so bewitching that none are obliged to explore below. Abt Vogler, of musical renown, defies poet and painter, only human workers, noble as are their arts, to rival his, where

is the finger of God, a flash of the will that can,
Existent behind all laws, that made them and, lo, they are!
And I know not if, save in this, such gift be allowed to man,
That out of three sounds he frame, not a fourth sound, but a star.
Consider it well: each tone of our scale in itself is nought;
It is everywhere in the world—loud, soft, and all is said:
Give it to me to use! I mix it with two in my thought
And, there! Ye have heard and seen: consider and bow the head!

And at the height of his exultation:

It is gone, the palace of music I reared!
. . . . . .
Well, it is earth with me; silence resumes her reign:
I will be patient and proud, and soberly acquiesce.
Give me the keys. I feel for the common chord again,
Sliding by semitones, till I sink to the minor,—yes,
And I blunt it into a ninth, and I stand on alien ground,
Surveying awhile the heights I rolled from into the deep;
Which, hark, I have dared and done, for my resting place is found,
The C Major of this life: so, now I will try to sleep.[13]

To the glory of his life the Musician sees an end; while death, three centuries earlier, leads the triumph of the Grammarian. I know few poems in which the reader

can be more present with the poet in the access of inspiration. We feel his successive thrills of joy, as he climbs step by step with the adoring scholars up through the dust of buried learning into the pure ether of reborn Hellenism :

Let us begin and carry up this corpse,
Singing together.
Leave we the unlettered plain its herd and crop ;
Seek we sepulture
On a tall mountain, citied to the top,
Crowded with culture !
All the peaks soar, but one the rest excels ;
Clouds overcome it ;
No, yonder sparkle is the citadel's
Circling its summit.
Thither our path lies ; wind we up the heights ;
Wait ye the warning ?
Our low life was the level's and the night's ;
He 's for the morning.
Step to a tune, square chests, erect each head,
'Ware the beholders !
This is our master, famous calm and dead,
Borne on our shoulders.
He was a man born with thy face and throat,
Lyric Apollo !
Long he lived nameless : how should spring take note
Winter would follow ?
Till lo, the little touch, and youth was gone !—
Cramped and diminished,
Moaned he, ' New measures, other feet anon,
My dance is finished ? '
No, that 's the world's way (keep the mountain-side,
Make for the city !)
He knew the signal, and stepped on with pride
Over men's pity ;
Left play for work, and grappled with the world
Bent on escaping :
' What 's in the scroll,' quoth he, ' thou keepest furled ?
Show me their shaping,
. . . . . .

Theirs who most studied man, the bard and sage,—
Give ! '—So, he gowned him,
Straight got by heart that book to its last page ;
Learned, we found him.
Yea, but we found him bald too, eyes like lead,
Accents uncertain ;
' Time to taste life,' another would have said,
' Up with the curtain ! '
This man said rather, ' Actual life comes next ?
Patience a moment !
Grant I have mastered learning's crabbed text,
Still there 's the comment.'
Oh, such a life as he resolved to live,
When he had learned it,
When he had gathered all books had to give !
Sooner, he spurned it.
Others mistrust and say, ' But time escapes ;
Live now or never ! '
He said, ' What 's time ? Leave Now for dogs and apes !
Man has Forever ! '
Back to his studies, fresher than at first,
Fierce as a dragon
He—soul-hydroptic with a sacred thirst—
Sucked at the flagon.
So, with the throttling hands of death at strife,
Ground he at grammar ;
Still, thro' the rattle, parts of speech were rife ;
While he could stammer
He settled ' Hoti's ' business—let it be !—
Properly based ' Oun '—
Gave us the doctrine of the enclitic ' de ',
Dead from the waist down.—
Here 's the top-peak ; the multitude below
Live, for they can, there ;
This man decided not to Live but Know—
Bury this man there ?
Here—here 's his place, where meteors shoot, clouds form,
Lightnings are loosened,
Stars come and go ! Let joy break with the storm,
Peace let the dew send !

> Lofty designs must close in like effects:
> Loftily lying,
> Leave him—still loftier than the world suspects,
> Living and dying.[14]

Whole libraries of the results of German research—patient as the Grammarian's own—could not reflect the ecstasy of the Renaissance, the magic of Golden Ages, Periclean, Augustan, come back to an amazed, rough-hewn Gothic world—could not represent that world's debt to the early martrys of learning, the Scaligers, Casaubons, who immolated lyric youth, gowned manhood, bald, hydroptic old age, dead from the waist down, battling with the expiring rattle over a due settlement of the enclitic 'de', a tenth part as intelligibly as the hundred and fifty trumpeting lines of this funeral chant!

An idea is always, somewhere, in everything Browning wrote. The variety of frankness, or the reverse, with which it reveals, or dissembles, itself is incalculable. Sometimes, as in a Lost Leader, Abt Vogler, a Grammarian's Funeral, he, more or less fully, unfolds it. Frequently the explanation is at hand, a little below the surface; just below, as the accumulation to Martin Relph's remorse for his dastardly treachery, that the secret of his crime—with its price—is safe, a torturing Hell in his own bosom:

> 'You were taken aback, poor boy,' they urge, 'no time to regain your wits:
> Besides it had maybe cost you life.' Ay, there is the cap that fits;[15]

just below, as the comfort to Hóseyn for the loss of his invincible mare, Muléykeh, that he alone holds the clue to her last victory; that none but himself understands how pride in her peerlessness could leave her the robber's rather than keep her shamed:

And they jeered him one and all: 'Poor Hóseyn is crazed past hope!
How else had he wrought himself his ruin, in fortune's spite?
To have simply held the tongue were a task for a boy or girl,
And here were Muléykeh again, the eyed like an antelope,
The child of his heart by day, the wife of his breast by night!'—
'And the beaten in speed!' wept Hóseyn: 'You never have loved
my Pearl.'[16]

Equally often we are left to grope about for an answer, as in Clive.[17] We can but imagine possibilities with a self-tormenting temperament, like his. Here he was, after thirty years of glory, brooding still with a shudder on disgrace which might have, but had not, befallen him in obscure boyhood. Such a nature would find the prospect of oblivion less intolerable than an old age of ease and a throng of that and other as rankling memories. I believe that the gallop from Ghent to Aix never had any specific historical foundation; that it is a parable of the essential grandeur of human effort, human sacrifice, without regard to the object; of the truth that unsparing endurance is never wasted, though, there be no good news, no news at all to be good or bad.

Whether Browning indulged or baulked the curiosity of his admirers over a puzzle had nothing to do with their convenience. It depended wholly upon his own. A compensation is that he regarded them so little as to have no shyness in thinking in public. He would have minded as little had he known that, taking the same liberty with his work, they presumed to complete an unfinished picture; to imagine, for example, the Pied Piper, kindly to the children as he had been vengeful to their sharp-dealing elders, playing eternal, wonderful music to the troop in gardens of Fairyland:

Where waters gushed and fruit-trees grew,
And flowers put forth a fairer hue,
And everything was strange and new.[18]

It is the same throughout. Browning, while he might be supposed to intend nothing but a song, was thinking, and often profoundly. In return, when meditating, he still sang. It would be idle for me to assert that in his work, outside his idylls and lyrics, melody is the primary attribute which a reader observes. Neither is it sentiment. The ear does not in Sordello, in Paracelsus, give, by drinking-in the music, the signal for the heart to glow. But whatever he wrote was poetry. None could ever mistake a dozen lines of his for prose. I would even go so far as to say, if a comparison had to be attempted, that when he is not making experiments in metre, or on the forbearance of his admirers, his verse, for instance, in Christmas Eve and Easter Day, La Saisiaz, or Parleyings, could be shown to be more absolutely distinguishable rhythmically from prose than In a Year, or Home Thoughts from Abroad, and From the Sea. How various the blank verse is, and how strong! How it seems to have sprung, ripe and full, from the brain of power! The thought stands out from it as the muscles in a statue by Michel Angelo. Into a sentence it can condense more than could be expressed in a page of prose. It can take a sentence of prose, and draw from it a hundredfold the meaning.

Singular merits; and as singular defects; the defects of the writer's qualities; and with greatness in both. The self-communing in particular, which lies at the basis of all his work, has its drawbacks. He would have rejoiced especially to shine as a dramatist. There the habit of dialogue unceasing might have been expected to be peculiarly valuable; and there, on the contrary, it mars the effect of his most promising enterprises. It renders them full of interest as poems; it pushes fatally into the background the action which is essential to a play's success.

Action in drama ought constantly to be visible and various. In Strafford, and the rest, with the possible exception of noble Luria, the real performance is of thought, not deeds. The interchange of thoughts themselves proceeds, not between two or more persons, but between successive mental emotions or moods of one. Each of the pair affecting to converse might ordinarily to all effects and purposes be alone on the stage. The propensity to looking exclusively within is no less answerable for the common kindred evil elsewhere of carelessness, if not contempt, of public opinion. No English poet has ever equally affronted his readers with spasmodic diction, with a tangle, by no means always significant, of ragged rhythm and random rhymes.

There—I have discharged my critical conscience; and if there be any other shortcoming of Browning's, let it be massed with the rest. At all events we may be sure that the total indictment will not counterbalance the depth—not less in Caliban than in Christmas Eve and Easter Day—the thoroughness, the grandeur of purpose even when he seems to be revelling in horror—as in the Inn Album, Ivan Ivanovitch, Forgiveness—the precision, the eloquence, the scorn of meanness, the generosity, the something neither wit exactly, nor exactly wisdom, which is 'Mr. Sludge, the Medium'. How, from a crabbed, jagged stanza, the picture of

> a castle, precipice-encurled,
> In a gash of the wind-grieved Apennine,[19]

leaps forth, as if illuminated by a flash of lightning, to subside back the next moment into darkness! How he can suffuse a sombre reverie, like La Saisiaz, with a halo of pathos! How abruptly, yet naturally, in his narratives beauty and deformity, guilt and innocence, luxury and poverty, interlace, as a Pippa passes, with her happy

lark-like songs—not the less happy for her rags—by the villa which harbours squalid adultery and murder, with remorse as squalid!

Nowhere in the society of his verse is there room for tedium. We feel his meditations to be better company than talk. One whose friendship I have prized for more than forty years, as I hope and believe he has mine, long since observed to me that 'reading Browning is like dram-drinking'. It enslaves; and I am willing to believe that it might scarcely be for the good either of poets or of their readers that many sources of similar intoxicants should be set running. Whether fortunately or not, however, the danger of temptation at any rate is remote. Such a poet-soul as Browning's is reared not often or easily. We may well apply to himself his own account of a poet's birth:

> Rock 's the song-soil rather, surface hard and bare;
> Sun and dew their mildness, storm and frost their rage
> Vainly both expend,—few flowers awaken there;
> Quiet in its cleft broods—what the after-age
> Knows and names a pine, a nation's heritage.[20]

The Poetical Works of Robert Browning. Six vols. Smith, Elder & Co., 1868:—Balaustion's Adventure, 1871. Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau, 1871. Fifine at the Fair, 1872. Red Cotton Night-cap Country, 1873. The Inn Album, 1875. Aristophanes' Apology, 1875. Pacchiarotto, &c., 1876. The Agamemnon of Aeschylus, 1877. La Saisiaz, 1878. The Two Poets of Croisic, 1878. Dramatic Idyls, 1879. Dramatic Idyls, Second Series, 1880. Jocoseria, 1883. Ferishtah's Fancies, 1884. Parleyings with Certain People, 1887. Asolando, 1890.

[1] Parleyings with Certain People, iii, With Christopher Smart, pp. 79-95.

[2] The Two Poets of Croisic, Prelude.

[3] The Lost Leader (Dramatic Lyrics), Poet. Works.

[4] Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister, ibid, st. 7.

[5] The Guardian Angels; a Picture at Fano, ibid.

[6] Prospice, Poet. Works.

[7] The Flower's Name, stanzas 3 and 5 (Garden Fancies, Dramatic Lyrics), Poet. Works.

[8] Hervé Riel (Pacchiarotto, &c.), st. 10.

[9] Parting at Morning (Dramatic Lyrics), Poet. Works.

[10] Evelyn Hope, st. 7 (Dramatic Lyrics), ibid.

[11] By the Fireside, st. 39 (Dramatic Lyrics), ibid.

[12] Ibid., st. 25 (Dramatic Lyrics), ibid.

[13] Abt Vogler (After he has been playing upon the Instrument of his Invention), stanzas 7, 8, and 12 (Dramatis Personae), Poet. Works.

[14] A Grammarian's Funeral, Shortly after the Revival of Learning in Europe (Dramatic Romances), Poet. Works.

[15] Martin Relph (Dramatic Idyls, 1879).

[16] Muléykeh (Dramatic Idyls, Second Series, 1880).

[17] Clive (ibid.).

[18] The Pied Piper of Hamelin, st. 13 (Dramatic Romances), Poet. Works.

[19] De Gustibus, st. 2 (Dramatic Lyrics), Poet. Works.

[20] Dramatic Idyls, Second Series, Epilogue.

ALFRED TENNYSON

1809—1892

THE poets—not only the great, but all the true—how each stands alone! Search the whole Calendar of Inspiration; no pair will be found for him with whom the register for the nineteenth century closes; no real fellow for Alfred Tennyson! The character of his genius was so unexpected that the general public took long to appreciate it. The delay was a tribute to its originality. To a few elect it was certain and heavenly. I envy their joyous and surprised recognition. Mighty Wordsworth, in the opinion of a younger generation, had declined to prosing, however wisely. Hellenic Landor raved. Rogers was antediluvian; and poor Leigh Hunt had never counted. The giants of the past were buried in their past, when a chant as exquisite as theirs, and at least as new and strange, rose into the dead air. To a brilliant, youthful brotherhood it must have been as when Christabel or Childe Harold soared above the stagnant mists half a century earlier.

The initiated were enraptured with all. The present generation discriminates. To a certain extent it has lost touch with much of the philosophy of The Two Voices, The Palace of Art, The Vision of Sin. It has outgrown the gladness, the sweet limpid sorrow, of the May Queen and its sequels, the Early Victorian elegance of the Miller's and Gardener's Daughters; even Locksley Hall the First, with its play of panoramic heart-flutterings. Though scarcely one discarded favourite but has lines, words, to

set even this twentieth-century pulse beating faster, the Lilians, Isabels, Madelines, Adelines, Margarets, and Eleanores, Mermen and Mermaidens, Orianas, Lords of Burleigh, and Ladies Clare and Clara, elicit smiles now instead of emotion. A large part, however, is fully as fresh as when first it danced into daylight. Custom cannot stale the radiant humours of Recollections of the Arabian Nights :

> When the breeze of a joyful dawn blew free
> In the silken sail of infancy,
> The tide of time flow'd back with me,
> The forward-flowing tide of time ;
> And many a sheeny summer-morn,
> Adown the Tigris I was borne,
> By Bagdat's shrines of fretted gold,
> High-walled gardens green and old ;
> True Mussulman was I and sworn,
> For it was in the golden prime
> Of good Haroun Alraschid.[1]

The wild swan's death-hymn may be music only ; but such music !

> At first to the ear
> The warble was low, and full, and clear ;
> And floating about the under-sky,
> Prevailing in weakness, the coronach stole
> Sometimes afar, and sometimes anear ;
> But anon her awful jubilant voice,
> With a music strange and manifold,
> Flow'd forth on a carol free and bold ;
> As when a mighty people rejoice
> With shawms, and with cymbals, and harps of gold,
> And the tumult of their acclaim is roll'd
> Thro' the open gates of the city afar,
> To the shepherd who watcheth the evening star.
> And the creeping mosses and clambering weeds,
> And the willow branches hoar and dank,
> And the wavy swell of the soughing reeds,

And the wave-worn horns of the echoing bank,
And the silvery marish-flowers that throng
The desolate creeks and pools among,
Were flooded over with eddying song.[2]

The land of the Lotos-eaters basks still in abiding mellow afternoon sunshine :

How sweet it were, hearing the downward stream,
With half-shut eyes ever to seem
Falling asleep in a half-dream !
To dream and dream, like yonder amber light,
Which will not leave the myrrh-bush on the height ;
To hear each other's whisper'd speech ;
Eating the Lotos day by day,
To watch the crisping ripples on the beach,
And tender curving lines of creamy spray ;
To lend our hearts and spirits wholly
To the influence of mild-minded melancholy ;
To muse and brood and live again in memory,
With those old faces of our infancy
Heap'd over with a mound of grass,
Two handfuls of white dust, shut in an urn of brass ![3]

We have not ceased to wander around the spell-bound sleeping palace—spell-bound ourselves—and its gardens :

Where rests the sap within the leaf,
Where stays the blood along the veins.
Faint shadows, vapours lightly curl'd,
Faint murmurs from the meadows come,
Like hints and echoes of the world
To spirits folded in the womb ;

waiting till the fairy prince has kissed back to life his destined bride :

And o'er the hills, and far away
Beyond their utmost purple rim,
Beyond the night, across the day,
Thro' all the world she follow'd him.[4]

The ancient wood has not lost for us its company of storied women :

> A daughter of the gods, divinely tall,
> And most divinely fair—

for whose beauty many drew swords and died ;

> A Queen with swarthy cheeks and bold black eyes,
> Brow-bound with burning gold ;

who by Mark Antony's side ' sat as god by god ' ; murdered Iphigenia, and Rosamond, ' whom men call fair ' ; the light of ancient France ; and her who, to a cry of indignant pity for the victim of the Gileadite's wild oath,

> render'd answer high :
> ' Not so, nor once alone ; a thousand times
> I would be born and die.
>
> My God, my land, my father—these did move
> Me from my bliss of life, that Nature gave,
> Lower'd softly with a threefold cord of love
> Down to a silent grave.
>
> It comforts me in this one thought to dwell,
> That I subdued me to my father's will ;
> Because the kiss he gave me, ere I fell,
> Sweetens the spirit still.
>
> Moreover it is written that my race
> Hew'd Ammon, hip and thigh, from Aroer
> On Arnon until Minneth.' Here her face
> Glow'd, as I looked at her.
>
> She lock'd her lips ; she left me where I stood ;
> ' Glory to God,' she sang, and past afar,
> Thridding the sombre boskage of the wood,
> Towards the morning star.
>
> Losing her carol I stood pensively,
> As one that from a casement leans his head,
> When midnight bells cease ringing suddenly,
> And the old year is dead.[5]

Tennyson's imagination found its themes anywhere and everywhere. Sometimes history supplied them, as in the Dream of Fair Women; sometimes legend and tradition. Scenes, incidents, men and women, touched by him, have become his, and real because his. We see them as he saw them, and almost forget that they have had other and earlier owners. Through him, and for him, the Lady of Shalott is an actual being, who, wistfully impatient, fearful of she knows not what,

> still in her web delights
> To weave the mirror's magic sights,
> For often thro' the silent nights
> A funeral, with plumes and lights
> And music, went to Camelot.[6]

It is in his voice that pure Sir Galahad tells how:

> 'Sometimes on lonely mountain-meres
> I find a magic bark;
> I leap on board; no helmsman steers;
> I float till all is dark.
> A gentle sound, an awful light!
> Three angels bear the Holy Grail;
> With folded feet, in stoles of white,
> On sleeping wings they sail.
> Ah, blessed vision! blood of God!
> My spirit beats her mortal bars,
> As down dark tides the glory slides,
> And starlike mingles with the stars!'[7]

In a kindred ecstasy, the cloistered maiden of his inspired creation keeps her vigil, beside even Keats's, on St. Agnes' Eve. The Lamb

> 'lifts me to the golden doors;
> The flashes come and go;
> All heaven bursts her starry floors,
> And strows her lights below,
> And deepens on and up! the gates
> Roll back, and far within

For me the Heavenly Bridegroom waits,
To make me pure of sin.
The sabbaths of Eternity,
One sabbath deep and wide—
A light upon the shining sea—
The Bridegroom with his bride!'[8]

Few of us can think of the rivalry of the Three Olympian goddesses without picturing to ourselves, in that

vale in Ida, lovelier
Than all the valleys of Ionian hills,

the forlorn figure of Tennyson's Oenone; without hearing her passionate appeal to many-fountained Ida, her Mother, and to Earth:

I will not die alone,
Lest their shrill happy laughter come to me
Walking the cold and starless road of Death
Uncomforted, leaving my ancient love
With the Greek woman![9]

Even the desolation of forsaken Mariana in her moated grange is no longer Shakespeare's alone, but is shared with Tennyson:

With one black shadow at its feet,
The house thro' all the level shines
Close-latticed to the brooding heat,
And silent in its dusty vines;
A faint-blue ridge upon the right,
An empty river-bed before,
And shallows on a distant shore,
In glaring sand and inlets bright.
But 'Ave Mary', made she moan,
And 'Ave Mary', night and morn,
And 'Ah', she sang, 'to be all alone,
To live forgotten, and love forlorn.'[10]

So necessarily and instantaneously are whatever materials he borrows his own—children of his fancy—that it is

difficult to suppose that even he himself can have laboured upon them. Each piece seems to have floated impulsively forth in the shape it keeps for us, although we know that in fact every one has been laboriously filed and burnished. When a theme is manifestly of a nature to demand a severe expenditure of thought, yet at his touch it seems unable to resist bursting suddenly into melody and simple sweetness. Against the counsels of despair in The Two Voices bursts the protest :

> 'Tho' I should die, I know
> That all about the thorn will blow
> In tufts of rosy-tinted snow ; '[11]

Over against the lurid pomp of The Palace of Art rises :

> An English home—gray twilight pour'd
> On dewy pastures, dewy trees,
> Softer than sleep—all things in order stored,
> A haunt of ancient Peace ;
>
> Or the maid-mother by a Crucifix,
> In tracts of pasture sunny-warm,
> Beneath branch-work of costly sardonyx,
> Sits smiling, babe in arm.[12]

From beyond the sardonic harshness of The Vision of Sin a divine glory becomes visible :

> Every morning, far withdrawn
> Beyond the darkness and the cataract,
> God made himself an awful rose of dawn.[13]

Often there is no text, no motive, except an irrepressible impulse to sing :

> Break, break, break,
> On thy cold gray stones, O Sea !
> And I would that my tongue could utter
> The thoughts that arise in me.

O well for the fisherman's boy,
That he shouts with his sister at play!
O well for the sailor lad,
That he sings in his boat on the bay!

And the stately ships go on
To their haven under the hill;
But O for the touch of a vanish'd hand,
And the sound of a voice that is still!

Break, break, break,
At the foot of thy crags, O Sea!
But the tender grace of a day that is dead
Will never come back to me.[14]

Tennyson had done a life's work by the time he was thirty. For another half-century he went on writing. Scarcely did he cease singing before in extreme age he ceased to breathe. He even continued to exercise, as in the two Northern Farmers, the gift of humour, which he had early manifested in the gay Monologue of the Cock, and, more grimly, in St. Simeon's thirstily meek acceptance of blasphemous idolatry. It is dangerous to oppose a critic of the intuition of 'Old Fitz', who deprecated his college-friend's persistent poetic diligence. I must, however, disagree. If the later serious poems miss the delicate fragrance, the real or apparent spontaneity, the audacity, of their youthful predecessors, the want is no sufficient ground for impatience at the continuance on the stage of the doer of great things in the past. Had the subsequent volumes by the creator of Oenone and The Dream been failures all, I should not myself have ventured to quarrel with him for pursuing his vocation any more than with a last season's blackbird for warbling as soon as he feels the Spring in his throat. But in truth literature would itself have suffered a grievous loss had Tennyson rested on his gathered laurels. For the Plays alone I say nothing.

Diversions, I will hope, to the writer, they had no business to survive him. Let them be decently buried—not in his grave; though some late violets may bloom even from their unmonumental mounds.

Elsewhere we should have lost wealth of fancy had he been frightened, living, into silence by the shadow of his own fame. He would never have sung in the Garden at Swainston:

Nightingales warbled without,
  Within was weeping for thee:
Shadows of three dead men
  Walk'd in the walks with me,
  Shadows of three dead men and thou wast one of the three.

Nightingales sang in his woods:
  The Master was far away:
Nightingales warbled and sang
  Of a passion that lasts but a day;
  Still in the house in his coffin the Prince of courtesy lay.

Two dead men have I known
  In courtesy like to thee:
Two dead men have I loved
  With a love that ever will be:
Three dead men have I loved and thou art last of the three.[15]

He would not have wrought that incomparable conceit, The Princess, or been tempted to inlay it with undying lyrics. We should have been orphaned of the music in

O hark, O hear! how thin and clear,
  And thinner, clearer, farther going!
O sweet and far from cliff and scar
  The horns of Elfland faintly blowing!
Blow, let us hear the purple glens replying:
Blow, bugle; answer, echoes, dying, dying, dying;

and

Home they brought her warrior dead;

with its exquisite tenderness :

'Sweet my child, I live for thee.'[16]

We should not have learnt how blank verse can be more lyrical than a lyric, from,

'Tears, idle tears,' I know not what they mean ;
Tears from the depth of some divine despair
Rise in the heart, and gather in the eyes,
In looking on the happy Autumn-fields,
And thinking of the days that are no more.[17]

Criticism naturally was apt to detect fallings-off in a career so prolonged. Such doubtless there were ; but how vast the balance of net gain to English literature ! If Maud is freakish, and its politics, sometimes its ethics, all astray, well might a complaint that it had never received justice be uttered by the creator of beauty, a profusion of beauty, like :

A voice by the cedar tree,
In the meadow under the Hall !
She is singing an air that is known to me,
A passionate ballad gallant and gay,
A martial song like a trumpet's call !
Singing alone in the morning of life,
In the happy morning of life and of May,
Singing of men that in battle array,
Ready in heart and ready in hand,
March with banner and bugle and fife
To the death, for their native land.
Silence, beautiful voice !
Be still, for you only trouble the mind
With a joy in which I cannot rejoice,
A glory I shall not find.
Still ! I will hear you no more,
For your sweetness hardly leaves me a choice
But to move to the meadow and fall before
Her feet on the meadow grass, and adore,
Not her, who is neither courtly nor kind,
Not her, not her, but a voice.[18]

Sometimes I have myself felt inclined to condemn the Idylls of the King for unreality and prolixity; as if one had a right to require tales of chivalry to be rational, terse, sententious, pithy! When in a juster mood, I admit that he must be a fortunate student of romance who is conversant with any more fascinating than Geraint and Enid, Launcelot and Elaine, the Last Tournament, for all their diffuseness; with aught more divine than Guinevere—where Tennyson found at length a worthy match for the else peerless creature of his youthful imaginings, kingly Morte d'Arthur.

What streamlet, again, in a dell of Parnassus ever laughed more gaily than the Brook, escaped from its encumbering frame? Where is there a more happily inspired Prothalamion than the Welcome to Alexandra,

> Bride of the heir of the kings of the sea? [19]

Where a battle-song to beat the Charge of the Six Hundred

> Into the valley of Death? [20]

Where a more triumphant funeral hymn than that on the Great Duke, with the grand break—the cry of the mighty Seaman from his tomb:

> Who is he that cometh, like an honour'd guest,
> With banner and with music, with soldier and with priest,
> With a nation weeping, and breaking on my rest? [21]

If impatience be felt at the resuscitation, on the grave's brink, of Locksley Hall, let it be remembered that three years later the worn brain demonstrated its victory over age in 'Crossing the Bar'.

Long indeed before that, yet many years after FitzGerald would have silenced his friend, the singer had tried triumphantly a new strain. I well recollect the depth of the impression produced by the appearance of In Memoriam.

No finer tribute, it was acknowledged, had ever been offered to the dead, even by Milton, or by Shelley. High as already was Tennyson's rank among poets, there had been doubters still. In Memoriam silenced them. It has never relaxed its hold on popular sympathy. Like his illustrious predecessor's Intimations of Immortality, it was felt—and with a more attaching melody—to combine Inquiry and Poetry, to be of the rare class of verse where

> All the breeze of Fancy blows,
> And every thought breaks out a rose.[22]

Lines in it have become part of ourselves. For many it is a manual of Faith :

> What am I ?
> An infant crying in the night :
> An infant crying for the light :
> And with no language but a cry.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> I falter where I firmly trod,
> And falling with my weight of cares
> Upon the great world's altar-stairs
> That slope thro' darkness up to God,
>
> I stretch lame hands of faith, and grope,
> And gather dust and chaff, and call
> To what I feel is Lord of all,
> And faintly trust the larger hope.[23]

For as many it is evidence for the Communion of Souls :

> When summer's hourly-mellowing change
> May breathe, with many roses sweet,
> Upon the thousand waves of wheat,
> That ripple round the lonely grange ;
>
> Come : not in watches of the night,
> But where the sunbeam broodeth warm,
> Come, beauteous in thine after form,
> And like a finer light in light.
>
> . . . . . .

I shall not see thee. Dare I say
  No spirit ever brake the band
  That stays him from the native land,
Where first he walk'd when claspt in clay ?

No visual shade of some one lost,
  But he, the Spirit himself, may come
  Where all the nerve of sense is numb :
Spirit to Spirit, Ghost to Ghost.

O therefore from thy sightless range
  With gods in unconjectured bliss,
  O, from the distance of the abyss
Of tenfold-complicated change,

Descend, and touch, and enter ; hear
  The wish too strong for words to name ;
  That in this blindness of the frame
My ghost may feel that thine is near.[24]

Nature had endowed Tennyson with certain qualities which defied the tendency of years to paralyse, or dull. His ear preserved its almost inimitable refinement, and instinct of harmony. His heart kept fire to kindle The Revenge, and The Victim. Brain and it maintained their alliance. In every line he still painted a picture. He never described without having made himself see the scene ; and he makes the reader see it through his mind's eye. With these inestimable gifts was conjoined, in an increasing rather than a diminishing degree, by experience, a judgement which waited, before intervening, for inspiration to play its primary part. Finally, born of unfailing self-respect first, and due regard for his public next, there was genius's infinite capacity for taking trouble. What a stern, Draconian critic he was of his own work, is manifest from a glance in the Life at the pieces he laid aside. Think of the exuberance of fancy which could afford to

reject the Mother's Ghost—on account, perhaps, of some want of finish, which in fact enhances the intensity !—

Not a whisper stirs the gloom,
  It will be the dawning soon.
We may glide from room to room,
  In the glimmer of the moon ;
Every heart is lain to rest,
  All the house is fast in sleep,
Were I not a spirit blest,
  Sisters, I could almost weep !

In that cradle sleeps my child,
  She whose birth brought on my bliss ;
On her forehead undefiled
  I will print an airy kiss ;
See, she dreameth happy dreams,
  Her hands are folded quietly,
Like to one of us she seems,
  One of us my child will be.[25]

Of all the capacities, bestowed and acquired, the crowning result was a poet, and nothing but a poet, with no ambition but that. The aspiration was lofty, as was Tennyson's whole conception of a poet's rank and duties. While unknown to the world, he had magnified his vocation. It was the poet's inheritance, he boasted, to 'see through life and death, through good and ill', nay, 'through his own soul' ; to be Wisdom's chosen interpreter :

No sword
Of wrath her right arm whirl'd,
But one poor poet's scroll, and with His word
She shook the world.[26]

His practice, within the limits of human strength, was in accordance. He desired to embody modern society's network of doubts in a marshalled legion of living and lived riddles, with the solutions, or attempts at them,

appended. He could not pass a contemporary problem by without adventuring an answer. More than one coeval at home, and across the Atlantic, had, as I have shown, the same craving. His special advantage was the possession, over and above gifts he shared with others, of the secret of irresistible melody. When once the strangeness of his method was surmounted, that acted like a spell upon Anglo-Saxon intelligence. Long before the end he had steeped the realm of English verse in an atmosphere all his own. Except from within one tent in the wilderness, no lyre sounded which had not been tuned or retuned in unison with his. Under the stress of the unchallenged absoluteness of his ultimate supremacy, an effort is needed to recall that he had to fight for his throne ; that he himself had often despaired, complaining that

> Once in a golden hour
> I cast to earth a seed.
> Up there came a flower,
> The people said, a weed.[27]

Have I overpraised ? I do not mean, in view of the very possible hint that I ought first to have considered what my eulogies were worth. To that taunt I know I have been exposing myself throughout my seventy-two comments. But, without regard to my title to an opinion at all, is the panegyric here out of just proportion to the claims of other poets ? At any rate I have never concealed from myself my theme's deficiencies. I perceive that the liquid sweetness is too invariable. The ear pines for a little harshness, a sense of open air ; for an occasional unintentionally broken-backed line. The mellifluous style tempts to verboseness, particularly in the Idylls ; in the rest, as well as those of The King, where, indeed, it is more excusable. At times it laboriously embalms a fly in amber. Too

many knotty questions are lightly propounded. There is a propensity to mistake sitting upon the puzzles of existence for their investigation, if not for their settlement. Not rarely the art by which Gray in the Elegy produced the effect of entire simplicity fails Tennyson. Though very seldom, even his taste is now and then at fault. In brief, his theology, moral philosophy, science, and skill in the construction of a plot, are those of a poet, not of a Bishop Butler, a Darwin, or a Wilkie Collins. He sings darkling, not soaring. There is the feminine note in his music. He is not quite the magician or prophet some of his disciples proclaimed him. Scrutinized closely his art betrays flaws which the delicate finish had covered—and his Muse is the more adorable for them all!

Within its proper boundaries his sovereignty is in no hostile rivalry with that of his reigning predecessors. On the contrary, loyal admirers may freely admit that the ancient enthronements were a condition of his. Without Chaucer, Spenser, Milton, Wordsworth and Coleridge, Shelley and Keats, without Dryden and Pope too, Cowper, and Byron, he would not have been that he was. From them all he learnt to choose the good, and, as profitably, to refuse the evil. His poetic soul, could its elements be analysed, would render glad account of the bountiful proportion of their essence it owes to its forerunners. Yet he remains himself a distinct and gracious being. The lyrics in The Princess and in Maud, with all their Elizabethan daintiness, are as self-evidently his in their fire and feeling as are the wit and wisdom of his Northern Farmers' proverbial philosophy. It was, as I have already intimated, a glory and a blessing for the nineteenth century that, just when the peal of inspiration which struck up at its opening,

seemed to have rung all conceivable changes of poetic thought and feeling, he arose to demonstrate that, given the man, the possible variations had in nowise been exhausted.

So may it be—so will it be—in the future as in the past, though, had the sun of great British singers actually been extinguished with Alfred Tennyson, its setting would not have dishonoured its dawn!

The Works of Alfred, Lord Tennyson, Poet Laureate. Collected Edition, Macmillan, 1884. Also, Works: Six vols. H. S. King. 1877

[1] Recollections of the Arabian Nights, st. 1.
[2] The Dying Swan.
[3] The Lotos-Eaters, Choric Song, st. 5.
[4] The Sleeping Palace, st. 1, and The Departure.
[5] A Dream of Fair Women, stanzas 22, 32, 51–62.
[6] The Lady of Shalott, Part II, st. 4.
[7] Sir Galahad, st. 4.
[8] St. Agnes' Eve, st 3.
[9] Oenone.
[10] Mariana in the South, st. 1.
[11] The Two Voices, stanzas 20, 24.
[12] The Palace of Art, stanzas 22, 24.
[13] The Vision of Sin, st. 3.
[14] Break, break, break.
[15] In the Garden at Swainston.
[16] The Princess: A Medley, 6. Song, Prelude to Bk. IV st. 2; and Song, Prelude to Bk. VI, stanzas 1, 4.
[17] Ibid., 4, vv. 21–5.
[18] Maud: A Monodrama. V, stanzas 1 and 3.
[19] A Welcome to Alexandra.
[20] The Charge of the Light Brigade.
[21] Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington, st. 6.
[22] In Memoriam, 122, st. 5.
[23] Ibid., 54, st. 5, and 55, stanzas 4–5.
[24] Ibid., 91, stanzas 1–4, and 93, stanzas 1–4.
[25] Life of Lord Tennyson by his Son, vol. i, pp. 124–5.
[26] The Poet, st. 14.
[27] The Flower (The Princess and Other Poems).

UNCLASSED

INSPIRATION always is unexpected in verse ; a surprise, I should suppose, to the writer, as it is to his readers. The unexpectedness, as he and they suddenly find themselves on wings borne aloft into the empyrean of fancy, is a chief virtue of the entire department of literature. At the same time, we have a positive right to look for it somewhere in accepted poets, in the elect. Inspiration is a necessary for them, as it is treasure-trove for their public. In casual reading of unclassed verse the element of chance comes in. The possibility of inspiration belongs to all 'unclassed' verse, ancient and modern, but rather specially, I should say, to English. When we open a volume with which, old or new, we have had no previous acquaintance, we never can be sure that we shall not light upon, not indeed an inspired poet, but an inspired poem. Inspiration is like the wind ; it bloweth where it listeth.

A Church truth, it has been laid down, must be able to assert for itself that it is 'quod semper, quod ab omnibus, quod ubique, creditum est'. Much the same in the way of inspiration is required of a candidate for the title of poet. He is not obliged to prove that all he has written has been inspired. Very few, if any, could abide such a test ; certainly not Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron ; not Shakespeare himself. The necessity is that the singer from time to time has been. For work unclassed, or by the unclassed, the condition is reversed. Its readers have to feel that, however it may have been with the poet, inspiration is in the poetry. That strange quality which separates true poetry from all else has to be, and is, in it. We cannot define it ; we can only explain it by its effects. It has, we

know, at its birth, moved, perhaps transformed, the author. We feel that, for the moment, it has transformed us. No credentials are wanted, no illustrious name. Suddenly the words catch fire, and our souls with them.

The sense of mastery, of transport, of a kind of magic, is always the same. The occasion, the circumstances, the paternity and affinities of the visitant, when we try to account for its presence, differ as widely as Spenser's inspiration from Pope's, or Wordsworth's from Byron's.

Sometimes the poet had constantly been within the author of such verse, but asleep, torpid. A shock had awakened him ; it spent its force ; and he sank back into lethargy or repose. Sometimes the piece represents the spring-tide of modest powers, a spasm of concentration of their essence, unintelligible to their owner. The writer's dominant impulse may have been other altogether than that of fancy. It may have been worldly ambition, indignation at tyranny or cruelty, wonder, love, the enthusiasm of piety. A lever has been sought to accomplish the craving of the ruling passion, and for the instrument verse has been requisitioned. Pure imagination's rival, rhetoric itself, will ever and anon force open in its flood a spring of pathos, rapture. Straightway we feel ourselves rapt from chill admiration into glowing sympathy. Sometimes it is all an accident. A vision, a ghost, has stumbled upon a stranger lodged in the haunted room. Sometimes it simply is that inspiration has been wandering after its manner in search of a home. Looking about for rest to the soles of its feet, it has taken refuge with no better than a versifier.

Poetry, from the time of its Elizabethan revival for some three-quarters of a century onwards, was in the British air. A larger life had opened for our islanders, freedom of soul,

new ambitions, an expanse of art, learning, luxury. They had grown into lords to govern a larger world. A language for such a period was wanting; and many, scarcely comprehending the change in their utterance, found themselves poets. They sang because they could not help it, and were inclined to be ashamed of the impulse. It seldom occurred to them to claim property in their strains. Never, though they might court popular favour from the stage, did it enter their minds to adopt minstrelsy as their vocation.

In such a period one who, had he chosen to abandon other pursuits, could conceivably have qualified for future generations, as a poet professed, might write Occasional Verse comparable with that by recognized masters of the craft. The Lie, commonly, though not universally, attributed to Ralegh, is a succession of lightning flashes:

> Say to the Court, it glows
> And shines like rotten wood;
> Say to the Church, it shows
> What 's good, and doth no good;
> If Church and Court reply,
> Then give them both the lie.[1]

No contemporary eulogy on Sidney surpasses his epitaph:

> What hath he lost that such great grace hath won?
> Young years for endless years, and hope unsure
> Of fortune's gifts for wealth that still shall dure;
> O happy race, with so great praises run![2]

His sonnet,

> Me thought I saw the grave where Laura lay,

worthily introduced the Faerie Queene. His appeal in the Pilgrimage from his persecutors to Heaven is inspired, if ever verse was:

> Blood must be my body's balmer;
> No other balm will there be given;
> Whilst my soul, like quiet palmer,
> Travelleth towards the land of heaven;

Over the silver mountains,
Where spring the nectar fountains;
  There will I kiss
  The bowl of bliss;
And drink mine everlasting fill
Upon every milken hill.
Then by that happy blissful day,
  More peaceful pilgrims I shall see,
That have cast off their rags of clay,
  And walk apparelled fresh like me,
  I'll take them first
  To quench their thirst
  At those clear wells
  Where sweetness dwells.
From thence to heaven's bribeless hall
Where no corrupted voices brawl;
No conscience molten into gold,
No forged accuser bought or sold,
No cause deferred, no vain-spent journey,
For there Christ is the king's Attorney,
Who pleads for all without degrees,
And He hath angels, but no fees.
And when the grand twelve-million jury
Of our sins, with direful fury,
Against our souls black verdicts give,
Christ pleads his death, and then we live.[3]

For sweet courtliness, if not for astronomical accuracy, almost as much might be said of Wotton's address to the hapless Winter Queen:

You meaner beauties of the night,
  That poorly satisfy our eyes
More by your number than your light,
  You common people of the skies;
What are you when the moon shall rise?
You violets that first appear,
  By your pure purple mantles known
Like the proud virgins of the year,
  As if the spring were all your own;
What are you when the rose is blown?

So, when my mistress shall be seen
In form and beauty of her mind,
By virtue first, then choice, a Queen,
Tell me if she were not designed
The eclipse and glory of her kind ?[4]

How rich in vagrant melody an age must have been which could toss abroad, for Nicholas Breton, the singer of gay Phillida and Coridon—for anybody—for nobody—to claim, the pathos of a song like that on a love-child !

Thou little thinkst and lesse dost knowe
The cause of this thy mothers moane ;
Thou wantst the wit to waile her woe,
And I my selfe am all alone ;
Why dost thou weepe ? why dost thou waile ?
And knowest not yet what thou dost ayle.

And dost thou smile ? Oh thy sweete face !
Would God himselfe he might thee see !
No doubt thou wouldst soon purchace grace,
I know right well, for thee and mee ;
But come to mother, babe, and play,
For father false is fled away.[5]

A great statesman, lawyer, philosopher, would at times sicken of ambition, even of wisdom ; and out of the shadows, without any intention or desire to be known thereby for a poet—and also not without reminiscences of Greek epigrams—may have flowed to and from Bacon's pen this bitter parable :

The World 's a bubble, and the Life of Man
Less than a span ;
In his conception wretched, from the womb,
So to the tomb ;
Curst from his cradle, and brought up to years
With cares and fears.
Who then to frail mortality shall trust,
But limns on water, or but writes in dust.

Yet whil'st with sorrow here we live opprest,
What life is best ?
Courts are but only superficial schools
To dandle fools :
The rural part is turn'd into a den
Of savage men ;
And when 's a city from foul vice so free,
But may be term'd the worst of all the three ?

Domestic cares afflict the husband's bed,
Or pain his head :
Those that live single take it for a curse,
Or do things worse ;
These would have children : those that have them none,
Or wish them gone :
What is it, then, to have, or have no wife,
But single thraldom, or a double strife ?

Our own affections still at home to please
Is a disease :
To cross the seas to any foreign soil,
Peril and toil :
Wars with their noise affright us ; when they cease,
We are worse in peace ;—
What then remains, but that we still should cry
For being born, and being born, to die ! [6]

The origin of a large body of lyric verse to be found in the Elizabethan and early Stuart drama is not very different. Wits who trusted for money and fame to their development of character on the stage, survive by rhymes they flung-in to employ some boy's tuneful voice. Thomas Dekker, who yet had dramatic genius, is sure of surviving through the simple grace of :

Art thou poor, yet hast thou golden slumbers ?
O sweet content !
Art thou rich, yet is thy mind perplexed ?
O punishment !

Dost thou laugh to see how fools are vexed
To add to golden numbers golden numbers ?
O sweet content ! O sweet, O sweet content !

Canst drink the waters of the crispèd spring ?
O sweet content !
Swimm'st thou in wealth, yet sink'st in thine own tears ?
O punishment !
Then he that patiently want's burden bears
No burden bears, but is a king, a king !
O sweet content ! O sweet, O sweet content !
Work apace, apace, apace, apace ;
Honest labour bears a lovely face ! [7]

The same casual quality cannot indeed be assigned to the great song, which chills as with the damp of death, in Webster's Duchess of Malfy. Into that the whole soul of the terrible play is condensed :

Hark, now everything is still,
The screech-owl, and the whistler shrill,
Call upon our dame aloud,
And bid her quickly don her shroud !
'Much you had of land and rent ;
Your length in clay 's now competent ;
A long war disturbed your mind ;
Here your perfect peace is signed.
Of what is't fools make such vain keeping ?
Sin their conception, their birth weeping,
Their life a general mist of error,
Their death, a hideous storm of terror.
Strew your hair with powders sweet,
Don clean linen, bathe your feet,
And—the foul fiend more to check—
A crucifix let bless your neck ;
'Tis now full-tide 'tween night and day ;
End your groan, and come away.[8]

But the rule of the slenderness of the connexion between a drama and its songs holds true of the twin lyrics of Shirley's, who, though born late, is, as a singer, Elizabethan. Both,

as full of awe—with nothing of the horror—as Webster's, might have been composed without relation to the masque and the entertainment they once glorified. Cupid and Death has ceased for centuries to lay any claim to the Ode :

Victorious men of earth, no more
  Proclaim how wide your empires are ;
Though you bind in every shore,
  And your triumphs reach as far
    As night or day,
Yet you, proud monarchs, must obey,
And mingle with forgotten ashes, when
Death calls ye to the crowd of common men.

Devouring Famine, Plague, and War,
  Each able to undo mankind,
Death's servile emissaries are ;
  Nor to these alone confined,
    He hath at will
  More quaint and subtle ways to kill ;
A smile or kiss, as he will use the art,
Shall have the cunning skill to break a heart.[9]

Even more independent, if possible, must the sister hymn have always been of its obscure semi-dramatic attendant :

The glories of our blood and state
  Are shadows, not substantial things ;
There is no armour against fate ;
  Death lays his icy hand on kings ;
    Sceptre and crown must tumble down,
And in the dust be equal made
With the poor crooked scythe and spade.

The garlands wither on your brow ;
  Then boast no more your mighty deeds ;
Upon Death's purple altar now
  See, where the victor-victim bleeds ;
    Your heads must come
    To the cold tomb ;
  Only the actions of the just
  Smell sweet, and blossom in their dust.[10]

In general, whether in the form of broadcast tributes to beauty, or of appendages to a tragedy, a comedy, a masque, whether solemn or gay, so long as the Elizabethan impetus lasted, English lyric literature has a constant note of spontaneity. We feel as we read that our concern is simply with the song. Its surroundings are not material; nor is the affix to it of a name. The author has not been singing for fame, or because he has the part of poet to support, but from mere spring of heart and wit! Lyly forgets his Euphuism, even in Cupid and Campaspe's game at cards for kisses, and yet more in his bird-song:

> What bird so sings, yet so does wail?
> O 'tis the ravished nightingale.
> 'Jug, jug, jug, jug, tereu,' she cries,
> And still her woes at midnight rise.
> Brave prick song! who is't now we hear?
> None but the lark so shrill and clear;
> Now at heaven's gates she claps her wings,
> The morn not waking till she sings.
> Hark, hark, with what a pretty throat
> Poor robin-redbreast tunes his note!
> Hark how the jolly cuckoos sing,
> 'Cuckoo!' to welcome in the spring!
> 'Cuckoo!' to welcome in the spring![11]

The impulse is one; the variety is endless. Thomas Lodge's fancy is equally fresh for an inventory of his fair Rosaline's beauties:

> Heigh ho, would she were mine!

and for pleading against a mischievous godling on behalf of equally fair Rosalynde:

> Love in my bosom like a bee
> Doth suck his sweet;
> Now with his wings he plays with me,
> Now with his feet.

Within mine eyes he makes his nest,
His bed amidst my tender breast;
My kisses are his daily feast,
And yet he robs me of my rest;
  Ah! wanton, will ye?

And if I sleep, then percheth he
  With pretty flight,
And makes his pillow of my knee
  The lifelong night.
Strike I my lute, he tunes the string;
He music plays if so I sing;
He lends me every lovely thing,
Yet cruel he my heart doth sting;
  Whist, wanton, still ye!

Else I with roses every day
  Will whip you hence,
And bind you, when you long to play,
  For your offence.
I'll shut my eyes to keep you in;
I'll make you fast it for your sin;
I'll count your power not worth a pin.
—Alas! what hereby shall I win
  If he gainsay me?

What if I beat the wanton boy
  With many a rod?
He will repay me with annoy,
  Because a god.
Then sit thou safely on my knee;
Then let thy bower my bosom be;
Lurk in mine eyes, I like of thee;
O Cupid, so thou pity me,
  Spare not, but play thee![12]

If Love's music is the most audible in the Occasional sixteenth-seventeenth-century verse, that was to be expected; and, as naturally, it is in all keys. It is embodied daintiness in Carew's moralizing:

He that loves a rosy cheek,
Or a coral lip admires,
Or from star-like eyes doth seek
Fuel to maintain his fires;
As old Time makes these decay,
So his flames must waste away.[13]

To grace it adds a sunny glow, in Ford's:

Can you paint a thought? or number
Every fancy in a slumber?
Can you count soft minutes roving
From a dial's point by moving?
Can you grasp a sigh? or, lastly,
Rob a virgin's honour chastely?
No, oh no! yet you may
Sooner do both that and this,
This and that, and never miss,
Than by any praise display
Beauty's beauty; such a glory,
As beyond all fate, all story,
All arms, all arts,
All loves, all hearts,
Greater than those, or they,
Do, shall, and must obey;[14]

and in that pretty foundling—if not Thomas Campion's—

There is a garden in her face
Where roses and white lilies blow;
A heavenly paradise is that place,
Wherein all pleasant fruits do grow;
There cherries grow that none may buy,
Till Cherry-Ripe themselves do cry.[15]

It grows tumultuous in another stray, Love the Adventurer:

You may esteem him
A child for his might;
Or you may deem him
A coward for his flight;

But if she whom love doth honour
Be conceal'd from the day,
Set a thousand guards upon her,
Love will find out the way.[16]

It uses and idealizes Davenant's Aubade, a delightful, if mannered, extravagance—worth all his leaden Gondibert :

The lark now leaves his wat'ry nest,
And climbing shakes his dewy wings.
He takes this window for the East,
And to implore your light he sings—
Awake, awake ! the morn will never rise
Till she can dress her beauty at your eyes.[17]

It is at once defiant and tender in George Wither's :

Great, or good, or kind, or fair,
I will ne'er the more despair ;
If she love me, this believe,
I will die ere she shall grieve ;
If she slight me when I woo,
I can scorn, and let her go ;
For, if she be not for me,
What care I for whom she be ![18]

When it knows itself safe, it will threaten, hector—and adore :

Like Alexander I will reign,
And I will reign alone ;
My thoughts did evermore disdain
A rival on my throne.
He either fears his fate too much,
Or his deserts are small,
That dares not put it to the touch,
To gain or lose it all.

But if thou wilt prove faithful then,
And constant of thy word,
I'll make thee glorious by my pen,
And famous by my sword ;

I'll serve thee in such noble ways
Was never heard before;
I'll crown and deck thee all with bays,
And love thee more and more.[19]

Our Tudor-to-Stuart poetry would not have been altogether shamed had it been able to support its title to share in Parnassus by none other than such chance blossoms as I have culled. It has the right to call in aid another contingent. There are European literatures in which folk-lore plays an important part. That it scarcely has held in English, though I do not know why it should not have. There are noble exceptions. A high spirit of romance breathes through the patchwork, yet wholly chivalrous, Syr Cauline.[20] The elder Chevy Chase,[21] the true subject of Sidney's qualified eulogium in his 'Defence of Poesy', deserves all that, and more. In general, I cannot in candour claim much for strictly English ballads. Those collected by Bishop Percy delighted our forefathers centuries ago. They continue, I hope, to be the delight of youth, as they were of mine. The Robin Hood series, the Nut-brown Maid, the Tanner of Tamworth, the Heir of Linne, the Beggar's Daughter of Bednall-Green, Mary Ambree, Brave Lord Willoughby, the Miller of Mansfield, and the like, are brave reading; they are not poetry.

The impetus of the Elizabethan renaissance doubtless was felt north of the Tweed, as appears in the learned and ingenious elegance of Drummond's song, 'Phoebus! arise!'

This is the morn should bring unto this grove
My Love, to hear and recompense my love.
Fair king, who all preserves,
But show thy blushing beams,
And thou two sweeter eyes
Shalt see than those which by Peneus' streams
Did once thy heart surprise.[22]

But for native Scottish imagination of the highest we must look to the wild-garden of Border Minstrelsy. That, while singularly unlike, at its best, to the coarseness of English broadsheet verse, and the polish of Elizabethan dramatic lyrics, matches the latter in fire of inspiration. Thus the English version offers no counterpart to the haunting dream of Earl Douglas in the Scottish tale of the Battle of Otterbourne :

I have dreamed a dreary dream,
Beyond the Isle of Sky ;
I saw a dead man win a fight,
And I think that man was I.[23]

Everybody, again, must have felt both the woe and the dignity of the grand old ballad of Sir Patrick Spens. Note the Captain's knowledge that he was being sent to his doom, and his simple obedience ; the instinct with which the few maritime details have been so chosen as to add as impressive reality to the impending disaster as the many in the famous shipwreck in Don Juan ; the narrator's splendid indifference to the fate of

The King's daughter o' Noroway,

in comparison with the loss of gude

Sir Patrick Spens, the best sailor
That ever sailed the seas ;[24]

Then the lament for Willie Drowned in Yarrow—how touchingly, wanderingly wistful !

Doun in yon garden sweet and gay,
Where bonnie grows the lilie,
I heard a fair maid, sighing, say
'My wish be wi' sweet Willie.
O Willie 's rare, and Willie 's fair,
And Willie 's wondrous bonny ;
And Willie hecht to marry me,
Gin e'er he married ony.

Oh, gentle wind, that bloweth south,
From where my love repaireth,
Convey a kiss frae his dear mouth,
And tell me how he fareth!

. . . .

But Willie 's gone, whom I thought on,
And does not hear me weeping;
Draws many a tear frae true love's e'e,
When other maids are sleeping.

O came ye by yon water-side?
Pou'd you the rose or lilie?
Or cam' ye by yon meadow green?
Or saw ye my sweet Willie?'

She sought him up, she sought him doun,
She sought the braid and narrow;
Syne, in the cleaving o' a craig,
She found him drowned in Yarrow.[25]

It and the Dowie Houms of Yarrow are in their acceptance of bereavement and desolateness as admirable as the concert of great later melodies to which they have given birth. In the second the final acquiescence, if reluctant, and pride of the girl in the obligation upon her bridegroom to face the certainty of death at the hands of her jealous brethren add a fine touch. He has been challenged, and knows—and she knows—he may not hold back:

For I maun gae, tho' I ne'er return
Frae the Dowie banks o' Yarrow.
She kiss'd his cheek, she kaim'd his hair,
As she had done before, O;
She belted him with his noble brand,
An' he 's awa to Yarrow.[26]

She was as brave in letting him go, as Helen of Kirconnell in interposing between the fatal shot and the lover she left despairing:

O Helen fair, beyond compare!
I'll make a garland o' thy hair,
Shall bind my heart for evermair,
  Until the day I die!

O Helen fair! O Helen chaste!
If I were with thee I were blest,
Where thou lies low and takes thy rest,
  On fair Kirconnell lea.

I wish I were where Helen lies!
Night and day on me she cries;
And I am weary of the skies,
  For her sake that died for me.[27]

The lamentation for 'burd Helen' is pure tenderness. More commonly in these Border stories the sense of helplessness deepens to despair. In Clerk Saunders, for example, as in Keats's Pot of Basil, the affection of the bereaved bride is agony, not grief. The lover's personal innocence does not alleviate his misery in the tragedy of the forlorn repulsed Lass of Lochroyan. Where remorse and pathos go hand in hand, guilt frequently forbids even the solace of a tear, as in the longing of fair Lady Anne to clasp to her bosom the 'snaw-white' dream-boy. It is her babe grown-up in Paradise, whom she had murdered to save her honour:

'''Tis I wad clead thee in silk and gowd,
  And nourice thee on my knee.'—
'O mither! mither! when I was thine,
  Sic kindness I couldna see.'[28]

Gloom is the favourite hue, as was congenial perhaps in an age and land of Douglas Tragedies, Bonnie Earls o' Murray, and Johnie Armstrangs, where every man carried his own life, and his over-the-Border neighbour's, in his hand. Though seldom without gleams of finer fancy, the favourite subjects are criminal wantonness, as in Earl

Richard [29] and the grand ballad of the Daemon Lover [30], sheer savagery, as in pitiless and unpitied Jellon Grame [31], and jealous vindictiveness. The last is the motive in Young Benjie [32], and the wild tale,' Binnorie, O Binnorie !'[33] The same in The Queen's Marie is coupled with the victim's stupor at the abrupt vision of death, for the small offence, as she accounts it, of mere womanly levity. The insane merriment is more painful than the weeping :

When she came to the Netherbow port
She laugh'd loud laughters three.
But when she came to the gallows' foot
The tears blinded her ee.[34]

Sometimes, as in ' Edward, Edward ', even the least throb of pathos is wanting. It is all a darkness which can be felt. What an imagination it must have been that let loose upon the moorlands a vision of sardonic horror like this !

' Why does your brand sae drop wi' blude,
Edward, Edward ?
Why does your brand sae drop wi' blude,
And why sae sad gang ye ? '
' O, I hae killed my hawk sae gude,
Mither, mither ;
O, I hae killed my hawk sae gude,
And I had nae mair but he.'
' Your hawk's blude was never sae red,
Edward, Edward ;
Your hawk's blude was never sae red,
My dear son, I tell thee.'
' O, I hae killed my red-roan steed,
Mither, mither ;
O, I hae killed my red-roan steed,
That erst was sae fair and free.'
' Your steed was auld, and ye hae gat mair,
Edward, Edward ;
Your steed was auld, and ye hae gat mair ;
Some other dule ye dree.'

'O, I hae killed my father dear,
Mither, mither;
'O, I hae killed my father dear,
Alas, and wae is me!'

'And whatten penance will ye dree for that,
Edward, Edward?
And whatten penance will ye dree for that,
My dear son, now tell me?'
'I'll set my feet in yonder boat,
Mither, mither;
I'll set my feet in yonder boat,
And I'll fare over the sea.'

'And what will ye do wi' your tow'rs and your ha',
Edward, Edward?
And what will ye do wi' your tow'rs and your ha',
That were sae fair to see?'
'I'll let them stand till they doun fa',
Mither, mither;
I'll let them stand till they doun fa',
For here never mair maun I be.'

'And what will ye leave to your bairns and your wife,
Edward, Edward?
And what will ye leave to your bairns and your wife,
When ye gang ovir the sea?'
'The warld's room; let them beg throw life,
Mither, mither;
The warld's room; let them beg throw life;
For them never mair will I see.'

'And what will ye leave to your ain mither dear,
Edward, Edward?
And what will ye leave to your ain mither dear,
My dear son, now tell me.'
'The curse of hell frae me sall ye bear;
Mither, mither;
The curse of hell frae me sall ye bear;
Sic counsels ye gave to me!'[35]

Mark the shuddering ghost, all along, of the mother's

knowledge that the parricide was inspired by her; the compulsion upon her soul to force her son to confess it; his reluctance to damn her with the avowal; and the curse upon herself which she extorts from his unlocked lips and heart!

We are sensible almost of relief when freezing cynicism, as it seems, rather than remorse, is voiced, not by man, but by rivers:

> Tweed said to Till—
> 'What gars ye rin sae still?'
> Till said to Tweed—
> 'Though ye rin wi' speed
> And I rin slaw,
> Yet where ye drown ae man
> I drown twa;'[36]

or by the hoarse accents of carrion birds:

> As I was walking all alane
> I heard twa corbies making a mane;
> The tane unto the t'other say,
> 'Where sall we gang and dine to-day?'
> 'In behint yon auld fail dyke,
> I wot there lies a new-slain knight:
> And naebody kens that he lies there,
> But his hawk, his hound, and lady fair.
> His hound is to the hunting gane,
> His hawk, to fetch the wildfowl hame,
> His lady 's ta'en another mate,
> So we may mak our dinner sweet.
> Ye'll sit on his white hause-bane,
> And I'll pick out his bonny blue een;
> Wi' ae lock o' his gowden hair
> We'll theek our nest when it grows bare.
> Mony a one for him makes mane,
> But nane sall ken where he is gane;
> O'er his white banes when they are bare,
> The wind sall blaw for evermair.'[37]

No witty, airy minstrelsy this of the Scottish heaths, when at its highest. So dour it is as to suggest that the unknown bards needed a murder, or a broken heart, to tune their harp-strings. But the inspiration is unmistakable. And remember:—I have been able to give but shreds of a vast floating cloud of song, with never a poet to claim for his own the genius, and the glory! The people's poetry—the ballads—in nine-tenths of England, by the end of the sixteenth century, which revised and vulgarized Chevy Chase, had lost all native glamour, independent vitality. Meanwhile, in Scotland, at least on the frontier, the whole survived and matured. The English Border, though, as may well be hoped and believed, it partook in the enjoyment, contributed little, except, possibly, the dialogue between the Tweed and the Till. For some three hundred years, more or less, the popular literature on the northern side was verse. All was handed down from memory to memory, with a recognized right in the interpreters at each stage to modify, and, within narrow limits, modernize. How these wanderers told a tale, and with a variety how rich! How made to suit all tastes and classes! The musician might be earning food and shelter in a rustic inn, or sympathy and largess in the halls of high Buccleuch. Like the 'silly blind Lochmaben harper',[38] he had store of tales, tragical and pathetic, as well as gross and grisly. The merit was as diverse. From a low depth it rose to points of sublimity, horror, tenderness, self-sacrifice, which educated inspiration may match, but rarely has excelled.

In England, if doubtless mainly for the educated classes, an afterglow of the cultured Elizabethan splendour endured to and throughout the period of the Restoration. It may be a mere coincidence; but it faded away with the advent

of reason, rights of citizenship, and full constitutionalism. English Poetry thenceforth consented to be conducted along regular professional channels. Its practice became a vocation, with its prizes in the book-market, and a tariff for the use and instruction of patrons. No longer did it lodge where the whim took it. The emanation of anonymous Occasional Verse of high merit ceased, with the rarest exceptions. A few pieces of distinction, not the work of writers already enrolled in my list of acknowledged poets, are by men better known in other departments of literature. Addison's Campaign is a rhetorical Whig monument to the Chief, who taught the doubtful battle where to rage ; and his Ode :

The spacious firmament on high,[39]

beats a stately march ; but their author is in sympathy with inspiration rather than himself inspired.

Parnell, the author of the unangelically Angelic Hermit, I cannot exalt as a poet. Yet a song of his is so daintily neat as to suggest a doubt whether it may not be something higher :

When thy beauty appears
In its graces and airs,
All bright as an angel new dropt from the sky,
At distance I gaze, and am aw'd by my fears,
So strangely you dazzle my eye !
But when without art,
Your kind thought you impart,
When your love runs in blushes through every vein ;
When it darts from your eyes, when it pants in your heart,
Then I know you 're a woman again.
There 's a passion and pride
In our sex, she reply'd,
And thus, might I gratify both, I would do
Still an angel appear to each lover beside,
But still be a woman to you.[40]

In Isaac Watts's Cradle Hymn I recognize traces of native inspiration, but inspiration pressed into doing suit and service to religious enthusiasm :

Hush ! my dear, lie still and slumber,
Holy angels guard thy bed !
Heavenly blessings without number
Gently falling on thy head.

How much better thou'rt attended
Than the Son of God could be,
When from heaven he descended
And became a child like thee !

Was there nothing but a manger
Cursèd sinners could afford,
To receive the heavenly stranger ?
Did they thus affront their Lord ?

Soft, my child ; I did not chide thee,
Though my song might sound too hard ;
'Tis thy mother sits beside thee,
And her arms shall be thy guard.

Yet to read the shameful story,
How the Jews abus'd their King,
How they serv'd the Lord of Glory,
Makes me angry while I sing.

See the lovely babe a-dressing ;
Lovely infant, how he smil'd !
When he wept, the mother's blessing
Soothʼd and hushʼd the holy child.

Lo, he slumbers in his manger,
Where the hornèd oxen fed—
Peace, my darling ; here 's no danger,
Here 's no ox a-near thy bed.

May'st thou live to know and fear him,
Trust and love him all thy days ;
Then go dwell for ever near him,
See his face, and sing his praise ! [41]

Sketches in black and white by Shenstone in The Schoolmistress appeal to our sense of the picturesque. Four lines in his so-called 'Levities' plumb depths of human sickness at humanity:

> Whoe'er has travel'd life's dull round,
> Where'er his stages may have been,
> May sigh to think he still has found
> His warmest welcome, at an inn.[42]

Now and then a gust of pity or self-pity blows rhetoric aside—rhetoric still, though of a noble sort, as in London and The Vanity of Human Wishes. For an instant something truer takes its place, and Johnson marks with tears, instead of antitheses,

> what ills the scholar's life assail,
> Toil, envy, want, the patron, and the gaol;[43]

or, mourning, with affectionate simplicity, almost with kindly envy, the obscurely wise, and coarsely kind 'practiser in physic', he sees

> Levet to the grave descend,
> Officious, innocent, sincere,
> Of every friendless name the friend.[44]

Pieces like these are interesting as palliatives of a prevailing sterility in respect of Occasional inspiration for some hundred years. Others, like Mickle's Cumnor Hall, are endeared by habit and tradition more than by intrinsic merit. But for a century after the close of the English poetical renaissance, the distinction I have drawn between poetry and writers of poetry has little practical application. During this tedious interregnum, such verse as deserves the name of poetry was the work of its poets. Very seldom did the phenomenon occur of a spark of genuine inspiration lighting upon a poetaster, of a divine emotion visiting unconsecrated lips, and insisting on

becoming vocal. For positive poetical insight I do not know that I could instance more than a trio of lyrics thus qualified. Ambrose Philips for once carolled, as a songster of the grove for its nestlings, to his

Little gossip, blithe and hale,
Tattling many a broken tale,
Singing many a tuneless song,
Lavish of a heedless tongue,
Simple maiden void of art,
Babbling out the very heart,
Sleeping, waking, still at ease,
Pleasing without skill to please.
Yet abandon'd to thy will,
Yet imagining no ill,
Yet too innocent to blush;
Like the linnet in the bush,
To the mother-linnet's note
Moduling her slender throat;
Chirping forth thy petty joys,
Wanton in the change of toys;
Like the linnet green in May
Flitting to each bloomy spray;
Wearied then, and glad of rest,
Like the linnet in the nest.[45]

Then there is Henry Carey's Sally:

Of all the girls that are so smart
There 's none like pretty Sally;
She is the darling of my heart,
And she lives in our alley.
There is no lady in the land
Is half so sweet as Sally:
She is the darling of my heart,
And she lives in our alley.

Of all the days that 's in the week
I dearly love but one day;
And that 's the day that comes betwixt
A Saturday and Monday;

For then I'm drest all in my best
To walk abroad with Sally;
She is the darling of my heart,
And she lives in our alley.[46]

In gaiety, flow and feeling at once sweet and wholesome, Sally, like Philips's verses on baby Charlotte Pulteney, transports us to an elder world. There is all the pride of youth, and the pathos of that pride besides.

And, thirdly, we have Christopher Smart's ode to David:

A song where flute-breath silvers trumpet-clang?

Dare I say of that more than Robert Browning has said already? Born in a mad-house, whether does it prove that its author had there first strayed from reason into inspiration, or that, by means of inspiration, he had at last recovered for a moment his genuine self? I confess to finding feeling in the song cramped by conformity to stiff and artificial canons. A Browning's imagination is needed for much reading between the lines before affinity may plausibly be claimed for it:

on either hand
With Milton and with Keats.

But I admire sincerely its frequent grandeur, as in the series of flashes revealing how:

The world, the glustering spheres, He made;
The glorious light, the soothing shade,
Dale, champaign, grove and hill,
The multitudinous abyss,
Where Secrecy remains in bliss,
And Wisdom hides her skill.[47]

Above all, I appreciate fully the wonder of the contrast—be it ascent, or fall. Such a flight—from craziness to

inspiration—then—years of sanity, but uninspired—not to 'die, but live', even sing, or feign to sing!

> 'How came it you resume the void and null,
> Subside to insignificance?' [48]

Conventionalism had all but stifled the life of Occasional Verse, and was threatening the main current of national poetic sensibility, when a temper of rebelliousness manifested itself. The malcontents looked at once back and forwards. Thomas Warton, and, still more practically, Bishop Percy, had the courage to remind of the old popular minstrelsy. They challenged continuing life—a twilight life, perhaps—for it in renovations of divers fine fragments. Collins, Gray, and Cowper threw down the gauntlet to the school of Pope. Much more revolutionary elements were soon to be at work. A fresh literary renaissance gave Scotland Burns. In England it was preparing for the advent of Wordsworth, Coleridge, Scott, Byron, Shelley, and Keats. Poetry, when thus it roused itself from its torpor towards the opening of the nineteenth century, woke into a new world. Movement was in it, with a sense of abundance of air. The poetic atmosphere, long since burnt up, was felt to have been renewed, for readers as well as authors. On both sides of the Tweed one characteristic of the revival was the same as had distinguished the Elizabethan. True and delightful poetry would now and again flow from the pens of writers hardly to be described as poets. The fact in Scotland is less surprising. There the poetic spirit, with or without poets, had never ceased to stir, if intermittently, in the indigenous minstrelsy which reminded Burns that he too might be inspired. Now, no longer with the original grim and tragic accent, though sometimes with the old simple carelessness of fame,

many a sudden melody will be found to have sprung up, like a rare flower in the waste.

Verse there was, though of real merit, with no distinctly indigenous properties; such as Logan's welcome to the Cuckoo, which warmed the heart of Edmund Burke:

> Hail, beauteous stranger of the grove!
> Thou messenger of spring!
> Now heaven repairs thy rural seat,
> And woods thy welcome sing.
>
> Sweet bird, thy bower is ever green;
> Thy sky is ever clear.
> Thou hast no sorrow in thy song;
> No winter in thy year![49]

But in other, somewhat later, lyrics of the eighteenth–nineteenth century, the spirit of the old minstrelsy, in its sad, if softened and more tender tones, is clearly audible. It breathes in the lament for Flodden:

> We'll hear nae mair lilting at our ewe-milking,
> Women and bairns are heartless and wae;
> Sighing and moaning on ilka green loaning.
> The Flowers of the Forest are a' wede awae;[50]

in musical wails of longing regret for Prince Charlie; and in rustic melancholy, as of Auld Robin Gray[51]; passing, now, into an interjection of protest against man's lot on earth:

> Wha'll buy my caller herrin'?
> Ye may ca' them vulgar fairin'!
> Wives and mithers, maist despairin',
> Ca' them lives o' men;[52]

now into a farewell to Earth merging in a vision of Heaven:

> I'm wearing awa', Jean,
> Like snaw-wreaths in thaw, Jean,

I'm wearing awa'
To the land o' the leal.
There 's nae sorrow there, Jean,
There 's neither cauld nor care, Jean.
The day is aye fair
In the land o' the leal.[53]

Although not the equal of such strains, another plaintive, Scottish Occasional lay—a cry of exiles in Canada for their old loved home—appears to me not altogether unworthy of association with them :

Listen to me, as when you heard our father
Sing long ago the song of other shores—
Listen to me, and then in chorus gather
All your deep voices, as you pull your oars !

From the lone shieling of the misty island
Mountains divide us, and the waste of seas—
Yet still the blood is strong, the heart is Highland,
And we in dreams behold the Hebrides !

We ne'er shall tread the fancy-haunted valley,
Where 'tween the dark hills creeps the small clear stream,
In arms around the patriarchal banner rally,
Nor see the moon on royal tombstones gleam.

When the bold kindred in the time long vanishèd
Conquered the soil, and fortified the keep,—
No seer foretold the children would be banishèd,
That a degenerate lord might boast his sheep.

Come foreign rage—let Discord burst in slaughter !
O then for clansmen true, and stern claymore—
The hearts that would have given their blood like water,
Beat heavily beyond the Atlantic roar.

Fair these broad meads, these hoary woods are grand ;
But we are exiles from our fathers' land.[54]

English writers, who, if born twenty years earlier, might never have affected to be poets, similarly yielded—fortu-

nately for us—to the rising influence. Charles Lamb, for example, was scarcely aware he could versify before he tried to turn his sister from tragic reveries by joining with her in the production of a little volume of Poetry for Children. It is the ideal of books for the entertainment of the young by their elders, as is Louis Stevenson's Child's Garden the ideal which might have been written by a child—inspired—for the entertainment of seniors. For the most part, charming as are things like The Magpie's Nest, Poetry for Children does not aspire to actual poetical honours. Yet the experiment taught Lamb, as in Nursing, which must be his, and in Hester, which he acknowledged, that, on occasion, he could sing.

How positive was the gift he has demonstrated in his farewell to the infant dying as soon as born :

> Mother's prattle, mother's kiss,
> Baby fond, thou ne'er wilt miss.
> Rites, which custom does impose,
> Silver bells, and baby clothes ;
> Coral redder than those lips
> Which pale death did late eclipse ;
> Music framed for infants' glee,
> Whistle never tuned for thee ;
> Though thou want'st not, thou shalt have them,
> Loving hearts were they which gave them.
> Let not one be missing ; nurse,
> See them laid upon the hearse
> Of infant slain by doom perverse.
> Why should Kings and nobles have
> Pictured trophies to their grave,
> And we, churls, to thee deny
> Thy pretty toys with thee to lie ? [55]

His friend Wordsworth could not with a finer instinct have analysed the moods of departed Hester, 'trained in Nature's school' ; her joy which was pride, and her pride

which was joy. I am only afraid he would have missed the tender humour in the sorrow :

> My sprightly neighbour! gone before
> To that unknown and silent shore,
> Shall we not meet, as heretofore,
> Some summer morning,
> When from thy cheerful eyes a ray
> Hath struck a bliss upon the day,
> A bliss that would not go away,
> A sweet forewarning ? [56]

Again, how the air quivers with ghostly sighs as we read :

> I have had playmates, I have had companions,
> In my days of childhood, in my joyful school-days—
> All, all are gone, the old familiar faces.
>
> I have been laughing, I have been carousing,
> Drinking late, sitting late, with my bosom cronies—
> All, all are gone, the old familiar faces.
>
> I loved a love once, fairest among women :
> Closed are her doors on me, I must not see her—
> All, all are gone, the old familiar faces.
>
> I have a friend, a kinder friend has no man :
> Like an ingrate I left my friend abruptly ;
> Left him, to muse on the old familiar faces.
>
> Ghostlike I paced round the haunts of my childhood,
> Earth seemed a desert I was bound to traverse,
> Seeking to find the old familiar faces.
>
> Friend of my bosom, thou more than a brother,
> Why wert not thou born in my father's dwelling ?
> So might we talk of the old familiar faces—
>
> How some they have died, and some they have left me,
> And some are taken from me ; all are departed ;
> All, all are gone, the old familiar faces.[57]

Proximity to verse like this provokes dangerous comparisons for any one. Certainly James Montgomery—whose

World Before the Flood, Greenland, and Pelican Island, I read in boyhood, I confess, with admiration—cannot often stand it. Yet Lamb himself would not have scorned the melancholy grace of a Falling Leaf :

Were I a trembling leaf
On yonder stately tree,
After a season gay and brief,
Condemn'd to fade and flee ;

I should be loth to fall
Beside the common way,
Weltering in mire, and spurn'd by all,
Till trodden down to clay.

Nor would I like to spread
My thin and withered face
In hortus siccus, pale and dead,
A mummy of my race.

No—on the wings of air
Might I be left to fly,
I know not and I heed not where,
A waif of earth and sky !

Who that hath ever been,
Could bear to be no more ?
Yet who would tread again the scene
He trod through life before ?

On, with intense desire,
Man's spirit will move on ;
It seems to die, yet, like heaven's fire,
It is not quenched, but gone.[58]

Still less would Elia have disdained companionship with an English, if a humbler, Burns. I am almost afraid to praise justly the Dorsetshire poet's The Wife a-lost, lest it should be the broad sweet Doric which has rocked the critical faculty asleep :

Since I noo mwore do zee your feäce,
Upsteäirs, or down below,
I'll zit me in the lwonesome pleäce,
Where flat-bough'd beech do grow;
Below the beeches' bough, my love,
Where you did never come,
An' I don't look to meet ye now,
As I do look at hwome.

Since you noo mwore be at my zide,
In walks in summer het,
I'll goo alwone where mist do ride,
Drough trees a-drippèn wet;
Below the raïn-wet bough, my love,
Where you did never come,
An' I don't grieve to miss ye now,
As I do grieve at hwome.

. . . . . .

Since I do miss your vaïce an' feäce
In praÿer at eventide,
I'll praÿ in woone sad vaïce vor greäce,
To goo where you do bide;
Above the tree an' bough, my love,
Where you be gone avore,
An' be a-waïtèn vor me now,
To come vor evermwore.[59]

I have hesitated whether to leave among the 'Unclassed' Thomas Lovell Beddoes. Happily for the credit of literature the thinker of Death's Jest-Book has always been appreciated, though there is irony in the admiration, confined as it is to a minute circle of students. Readers in general still are not likely to try to solve a series of problems there set, and commonly much knottier even than that grand and profound Dirge:

To-day is a thought, a fear is to-morrow,
And yesterday is our sin and our sorrow;

And life is a death,
Where the body 's the tomb,
And the pale sweet breath
Is buried alive in its hideous gloom.
Then waste no tear,
For we are the dead, the living are here,
In the stealing earth, and the heavy bier.
Death lives but an instant, and is but a sigh,
And his son is unnamed immortality,
Whose being is thine. Dear ghost, so to die
Is to live,—and life is a worthless lie—
Then we weep for ourselves, and wish thee goodbye.[60]

The same difficulty has met me in the case of Sydney Dobell. The longer poems, The Roman and Balder, abound in fine passages. I find no false tone in the shorter. Yet I doubt ; and I know not exactly why. But I am sure that Balder's song, Laus Deo, on a loving widow's incapability—after 'seven long days and seven long nights' beside the open coffin—of measuring the wonder of bereavement by time :—

'On your lives!' she shriek'd and cried, 'he is but newly dead!'[61]—

deserves to be, and that Keith of Ravelston, with its charm of reserve, of half-lights, of mystery, already is, among the Immortals :

The murmur of the mourning ghost
That keeps the shadowy kine,
'Oh, Keith of Ravelston,
The sorrows of thy line!'

Ravelston, Ravelston,
The merry path that leads
Down the golden morning hill,
And thro' the silver meads;

Ravelston, Ravelston,
  The stile beneath the tree,
The maid that kept her mother's kine,
  The song that sang she!

She sang her song, she kept her kine,
  She sat beneath the thorn
When Andrew Keith of Ravelston
  Rode thro' the Monday morn,

His henchmen sing, his hawk-bells ring,
  His belted jewels shine!
Oh, Keith of Ravelston,
  The sorrows of thy line!

Year after year, where Andrew came,
  Comes evening down the glade,
And still there sits a moonshine ghost
  Where sat the sunshine maid.

Her misty hair is faint and fair,
  She keeps the shadowy kine;
Oh, Keith of Ravelston,
  The sorrows of thy line!

I lay my hand upon the stile,
  The stile is lone and cold,
The burnie that goes babbling by
  Says nought that can be told.

Yet, stranger! here, from year to year,
  She keeps her shadowy kine;
Oh, Keith of Ravelston,
  The sorrows of thy line!

Step out three steps, where Andrew stood—
  Why blanch thy cheeks for fear?
The ancient stile is not alone,
  'Tis not the burn I hear!

She makes her immemorial moan,
She keeps her shadowy kine;
Oh, Keith of Ravelston,
The sorrows of thy line![62]

By this time, almost unconsciously, I have advanced far into the nineteenth century. But I have passed over many distinguished names; some in their day even famous, and a few still. The roll would be lengthy were it confined strictly to the century: and it has to comprise half a dozen or more born in the previous one. I note Charles Dibdin, author of Tom Bowling, and much of marine renown besides; Reginald Heber, of Palestine, and one immortal hymn; Joanna Baillie, of dramas once illustrious; Kirke White, for his fame, happy in an early death; John Wilson, of the Isle of Palms, and arbiter of literature as 'Christopher North'; Robert Pollok, with the severe and serious Course of Time; John Clare, with Poems of Rural Life, and Robert Bloomfield, of the Farmer's Boy, twin victims of a poetic germ never matured; Bryan Waller Procter—'Barry Cornwall'—best remembered for breezy songs; Alaric Watts, with Lyrics of the Heart; John Moultrie, of My Brother's Grave and Godiva; Sir Thomas Noon Talfourd, of Ion; Charles Wells, whose drama, Joseph and his Brethren, was 'discovered' three years before his death by Swinburne; W. L. Bowles, whose Sonnets Coleridge, in his schooldays, as he could not afford to buy, copied out; Allan Cunningham, singer of

A wet sheet and a flowing sea;

hapless 'L. E. L.', the admired of drawing-rooms for The Improvisatrice; Mrs. Barbauld, whose Life it was thought must ever be remembered:

Life! we've been long together,
Through pleasant and through cloudy weather;
'Tis hard to part when friends are dear;
Perhaps 'twill cost a sigh, a tear;
Then steal away, give little warning,
Choose thine own time,
Say not 'Good-night', but in some brighter clime
Bid me 'Good-morning'; [63]

Felicia Hemans, whose Homes of England and Graves of a Household, notwithstanding all their honeyed sweetness, will not be forgotten; Henry Stebbing, with poetry, as in Jesus and A Long Railway Journey, characterized, if a son may testify, by melody and high thought; [64] Archbishop Trench, of a rich fancy, as displayed in verse like Justin Martyr and the ballad of Harmosan; Emily Brontë—one of an extraordinary trio of sisters—on whose verse inspiration seems—as in The Visionary—always to be waiting to descend; Aytoun, chronicling with picturesque solemnity the Burial March of Dundee and the Execution of Montrose; Lord Lytton, though dramatist rather than poet, and his son, Earl of Lytton, author of Fables in Song and King Poppy; Mrs. Norton, scarcely less brilliant with her pen—as in The Lady of La Garaye—than socially; the two de Veres, Sir Aubrey and Aubrey Thomas, both romantic spirits, content to have been born too late, or too early; Horne, flinging his Orion at an unregarding public; Robert Buchanan, whose London Poems and Balder the Beautiful show poetic insight; Philip James Bailey, with Festus, a powerful conception suffocated by stillborn accretions; Alexander Smith, with popularity of the Jonah-gourd kind; the brothers, Frederick Tennyson, of Days and Hours, and Charles Tennyson Turner, of the Sonnets, each recognized, but not as yet justly appreciated; William Allingham, possessed of a delicate touch for a ballad or story,

and a most tuneful ear; Charles Mackay, a fluent song and progress writer; Gerald Massey, with his tender and sweet Ballad of Babe Christabel; Philip Stanhope Worsley, cut off from literature by sickness and premature death, whose Spenserian translation of the Odyssey, if not of its companion, the Iliad, has rendered all other metrical versions superfluous; T. E. Brown, a born poet, and a Manx patriot, who chose to block by a dialect the neighbouring islanders' enjoyment, in Fo'c's'le Yarns,[65] of a pathos never exaggerated, admirable character-drawing and scene-painting in words; and—finally, for the nineteenth century—Frederick Locker-Lampson, whose London Lyrics continue, I hope, to set the chimes from scores of dingy steeples ringing; as for My Charming Neighbour Rose:

> The bells are ringing. As is meet,
> White favours fascinate the street,
> Sweet faces greet me, rueful-sweet
> 'Twixt tears and laughter;
> They crowd the door to see her go,
> The bliss of one brings many woe;—
> O, kiss the bride, and I will throw
> The old shoe after.[66]

Whenever—as three centuries back, and, again, two later—the sun has dispersed the clouds about the peaks of Parnassus, it shines, if fitfully, upon a curiously mixed crowd gathered at the foot. Particularly, in the course of, and consequent upon, last century's poetic revival, it has been a bewildering assemblage, by virtue of its merits as much as of its defects. Education, reading, and a cultivated habit of good taste have so raised the level of average versifying as to blur the boundary lines between genius and a respectable mediocrity. My task of discrimination has been lightened by Francis Turner Palgrave's Golden

Treasury of Songs, and Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch's Oxford Book of English Verse—each admirable. Sometimes the volumes have brought one or another lyric for the first time to my notice. Often they have recalled excellence to my recollection, and reflection.

All students, both past and present, of poetry will agree that the right to the title of 'poet' and 'poetry' depends on the possession by the candidates of inspiration. Only, the standard for that? Naturally it is a property which easily evades ordinary analysis for general use. In the first place, it is wonderful how good may be verse without being inspired; how sincerely one generation may, and another fail to, recognize its presence. A writer may himself conscientiously believe in its descent upon his soul, yet be unable to infuse it into his lines. Among the various circumstances, or accidents, may be found an explanation of a common literary phenomenon. It is the frequent heading of chapters with lines not in the least poetry, and their importation into the text of intelligent prose. Beyond doubt it is one of the reasons why true poets make bad judges of the merits of their own work. Also, from this, on the other hand, and from analogous causes, a denial of inspiration to particular pieces is open almost to as much questioning. A later generation may possibly rehabilitate as 'poets' not a few dead nineteenth-century celebrities. Meanwhile, I rejoice to think, 'poems', at all events, in fair numbers have survived the last century, and survive still.

Thus, though the permanent place of Christina Rossetti—Dante Gabriel's sister—is not yet decided, listen to Echo; and we may be sure it will be honourable:

> Come to me in the silence of the night;
> Come in the speaking silence of a dream;

Come with soft rounded cheeks and eyes as bright
As sunlight on a stream;
Come back in tears,
O memory, hope, love of finished years.[67]

Ponder the cold, calm bitter-sweet of

When I am dead, my dearest,
Sing no sad songs for me;
Plant thou no roses at my head,
Nor shady cypress tree.
Be the green grass above me
With showers and dewdrops wet;
And if thou wilt, remember,
And if thou wilt, forget.

I shall not see the shadows,
I shall not feel the rain;
I shall not hear the nightingale
Sing on, as if in pain;
And dreaming through the twilight
That doth not rise nor set,
Haply I may remember,
And haply may forget.[68]

Read further; and an inclination to fix forthwith the writer's rank will have grown:

Does the road wind uphill all the way?
Yes, to the very end.
Will the day's journey take the whole long day?
From morn to night, my friend.

But is there for the night a resting-place?
A roof for when the slow, dark hours begin.
May not the darkness hide it from my face?
You cannot miss that inn.

Shall I meet other wayfarers at night?
Those who have gone before.
Then must I knock, or call when just in sight?
They will not keep you standing at that door.

Shall I find comfort, travel-sore and weak ?
Of labour you shall find the sum.
Will there be beds for me and all who seek ?
Yea, beds for all who come.[69]

Pathos perhaps ; and pathos is insidious. Yet there is pathos which is just the bloom upon strength—a pathos other than Letitia Barbauld's, though she wrote Life ; than Felicia Hemans's, though she wrote Graves of a Household, a pathos akin to Wordsworth's, when he sang of Lucy—Is this Christina Rossetti's?

Sometimes, when the inspiration is far from the rule, we wonder why it waited on this or that particular piece ; how, from the pile of Whittier's well-intentioned, tuneful, starless verse leaps forth John Bright's favourite, Skipper Ireson's awaking to remorse for the desertion of his brother fishermen in a tempest !

'Hear me, neighbours ! ' at last he cried,—
'What to me is this noisy ride ?
What is the shame that clothes the skin
To the nameless horror that lives within ?
Waking or sleeping, I see a wreck,
And hear a cry from a reeling deck !
Hate me and curse me,—I only dread
The hand of God and the face of the dead ! '

Said Flud Oirson, fur his horrd horrt,
Torr'd an' futherr'd an' corr'd in a corrt
By the women o' Morble 'ead ![70]

The ode, again, to a Waterfowl—was it born in Bryant's capable soul, or did it float to his pen from the air around, as, far on high, the bird to his sight ?

Whither, 'midst falling dew
While glow the heavens with the last steps of day,
Far through their rosy depths dost thou pursue
Thy solitary way ?

Vainly the fowler's eye
Might mark thy distant flight to do thee wrong,
As darkly seen against the crimson sky
Thy figure floats along.
Seek'st thou the plashy brink
Of weedy lake, or marge of river wide,
Or where the rocking billows rise and sink
On the chafed ocean-side ?
There is a Power whose care
Teaches thy way along that pathless coast—
The desert and illimitable air—
Lone wandering, but not lost.
All day thy wings have fanned,
At that far height, the cold thin atmosphere,
Yet stoop not, weary, to the welcome land,
Though the dark night is near.
And soon that toil shall end,
Soon shalt thou find a summer home, and rest,
And scream among thy fellows ; reeds shall bend
Soon o'er thy sheltered nest.[71]

How mystically, strangely sweet, from amid the beats, patriotic, rather than ethereal, of the Corn-law Rhymer's drum, rings the music :

Dark, deep, and cold the current flows
Unto the sea where no wind blows,
Seeking the land which no one knows.

Why shrieks for help yon wretch, who goes
With millions, from a world of woes,
Unto the land which no one knows ?

Though myriads go with him who goes,
Alone he goes where no wind blows,
Unto the land which no one knows.

For all must go where no wind blows,
And none can go for him who goes ;
None, none return whence no one knows.

Yet why should he who shrieking goes
With millions, from a world of woes,
Reunion seek with it or those ?

Alone with God, where no wind blows,
And Death, his shadow—doom'd, he goes ;
That God is there the shadow shows.

Oh, shoreless Deep, where no wind blows !
And thou, oh, Land which no one knows !
That God is All, His shadow shows.[72]

Every reader of The Lays of Ancient Rome must feel that Macaulay longed to be a poet. Yet those rushing chronicles of his, while they possess a host of other merits, have not the one he coveted most. It is the more gracious of the Muse to have once pitied and rewarded the worship, learning, and yearning with a change of water into wine, of sonorous rhetoric into haunting poetry. That character cannot be denied to the picture of 'false Sextus' at the Battle of Lake Regillus :

Men said he saw strange visions
  Which none beside might see,
And that strange sounds were in his ears,
  Which none might hear but he.

A woman fair and stately,
  But pale as are the dead,
Oft through the watches of the night
  Sate spinning by his bed.

And as she plied the distaff,
  In a sweet voice and low,
She sang of great old houses,
  And fights fought long ago.

So spun she, and so sang she,
  Until the east was gray,
Then pointed to her bleeding breast,
  And shrieked, and fled away.[73]

English literary history contains a few cases in which a considerable mind has become inspired, and been content with the single effort. So it was with Spanish Blanco White in the address to Night, a thing of true, pensive dignity, though overpraised by no less than, in his maturity, Coleridge as 'the finest and most grandly conceived sonnet in our language':

> Mysterious Night! when our first parent knew
> Thee from report divine, and heard thy name,
> Did he not tremble for this lovely frame,
> This glorious canopy of light and blue?
> Yet 'neath a curtain of translucent dew,
> Bathed in the rays of the great setting flame,
> Hesperus with the host of Heaven came;
> And lo! Creation widened in man's view!
> Who could have thought such darkness lay concealed
> Within thy beams, O Sun! or who could find,
> Whilst fly, and leaf, and insect stood reveal'd,
> That to such countless Orbs thou madst us blind?
> Why do we, then, shun Death with anxious strife?
> If Light can thus deceive, wherefore not Life? [74]

A more ordinary experience is for a subject of inspiration to relax the spiritual tension which produced it than to stop versifying. Praed's fancy conceived in the Red Fisherman much more than a happy jeu d'esprit. It is a fine strain, in which Satan is described as angling with bait of State intrigues for a saintly Churchman. The brilliant writer of vers de société might have developed into a true poet had the next twelve years of his short life not been wasted upon Parliament. Though he versified still, he carried the hook of politics to his grave:

> There was turning of keys, and creaking of locks,
> As he stalked away with his iron box.

'Oho! Oho!
The cock doth crow;
It is time for the Fisher to rise and go.
Fair luck to the Abbot, fair luck to the shrine!
He hath gnawed in twain my choicest line;
Let him swim to the north, let him swim to the south,
The Abbot will carry my hook in his mouth!' [75]

Hartley Coleridge, with a true poetic instinct, had also, as it were, a mortgaged inheritance to redeem. But for lack of will, he had ear and imagination to become what metaphysical theology had induced his marvellous father to cease to be. As it is, it may be hoped that he will be remembered for more than one or two charming songs:

She is not fair to outward view
As many maidens be.
Her loveliness I never knew
Until she smil'd on me;
Oh! then I saw her eye was bright,
A well of love, a spring of light.

But now her looks are coy and cold,
To mine they ne'er reply,
And yet I cease not to behold
The love-light in her eye;
Her very frowns are fairer far,
Than smiles of other maidens are.[76]

I should grieve to think that nothing else is left from the work of the generous soul of Monckton-Milnes; but a shadow must remain:

They seemed to those who saw them meet
The worldly friends of every day;
Her smile was undisturbed and sweet,
His courtesy was free and gay.

But yet if one the other's name
In some unguarded moment heard,
The heart you thought so calm and tame,
Would struggle like a captive bird;

And letters of mere formal phrase
  Were blistered with repeated tears,—
And this was not the work of days,
  But had gone on for years and years! [77]

If the reading world discards much of Jean Ingelow's verse there cannot but survive the great ballad—fit to rank beside The Sands of Dee—The High Tide on the Coast of Lincolnshire; with the drowning in raging Lindis, as lamented by the old father-in-law, of 'my sonnis wife, Elizabeth':

'I shall never hear her more
    By the reedy Lindis shore,
"Cusha! Cusha! Cusha!" calling,
    Ere the early dews be falling;
I shall never hear her song.
    "Cusha! Cusha!" all along
Where the sunny Lindis floweth,
    Goeth, floweth;
From the meads where melick groweth,
Where the water winding down
Onward floweth to the town.

I shall never see her more
Where the reeds and rushes quiver,
    Shiver, quiver;
Stand beside the sobbing river,
Sobbing, throbbing, in its falling
To the sandy, lonesome shore;
I shall never hear her calling,
"Leave your meadow grasses mellow,
    Mellow, mellow;
Quit your cowslips, cowslips yellow;
Come uppe Whitefoot, come uppe Lightfoot;
Quit your pipes of parsley hollow,
    Hollow, hollow;
Come uppe Lightfoot, rise and follow;
    Lightfoot, Whitefoot,

From your clovers lift the head ;
Come uppe Jetty, follow, follow,
Jetty, to the milking shed." '[78]

Poetry is not always serious. It can play. During the nineteenth century, as earlier, it was used for political satire and pastime—frequently by writers of distinction in other fields. Early examples are 'Classic' Canning's Friend of Humanity, which once any schoolboy would have been ashamed to be unable to repeat :

Needy knife-grinder ! whither are you going ?

the Rejected Addresses, the no less famous Ingoldsby Legends, Hood's verse, as humorist, and, later, a wreath of ballads, from the heroic one on Little Billee to the description of a Mediterranean gale—April laughter, not without a tear here and there—by Thackeray :

And when, its force expended,
The harmless storm was ended,
And, as the sunrise splendid
Came blushing o'er the sea ;

I thought, as day was breaking,
My little girls were waking,
And smiling, and making
A prayer at home for me.[79]

Others are by Shirley Brooks, Punch's poet-laureate of Wit and Humour ; by Charles Stuart Calverley, the brilliant flashes of a subtle wit which he styled 'Verses and Translations ; and by 'Lewis Carroll' in the fantasia, 'The Hunting of the Snark.' About midway in the number of writers, both in birth and death, comes Dean Mansel with that prodigy of biting satire, scholarly virulence, and melody too, Phrontisterion. Here is its Hymn to the Infinite by the full Chorus of Cloudy Professors :

The voice of yore,
Which the breezes bore
Wailing aloud from Paxo's shore,
Is changed to a gladder and livelier strain,
For great God Pan is alive again,
He lives, and he reigns once more.
With deep intuition and mystic rite
We worship the Absolute-Infinite,
The Universe—Ego, the Plenary—Void,
The subject-Object identified,
The great Nothing-Something, the Being-Thought,
That mouldeth the mass of Chaotic Nought,
Whose beginning unended and end unbegun
Is the One that is All and the All that is One.
Hail Light with Darkness joined!
Thou Potent Impotence!
Thou Quantitative Point
Of all Indifference!
Great Non-Existence, passing into Being,
Thou two-fold Pole of the Electric One,
Thou Lawless Law, thou Seer all Unseeing,
Thou Process, ever doing, never done!
Thou Positive Negation!
Negative Affirmation!
Thou great Totality of every thing
That never is, but ever doth become,
Thee do we sing
The Pantheists' King,
With ceaseless bug, bug, bug, and endless hum, hum, hum.[80]

A wonderful tour de force by a thinker, not an habitual verse-writer; overpowering and tomahawking. Let me temper it with a delightful flow of fancy by one who, like a contemporary, another great master in romance, might, had he so elected, have been renowned chiefly as a poet:

When at home alone I sit
And am very tired of it,

I have just to shut my eyes
To go sailing through the skies—
To go sailing far away
To the pleasant Land of Play,

To the fairyland afar
Where the Little People are;
Where the clover-tops are trees,
And the rain-pools are the seas,
And the leaves like little ships
Sail about on tiny trips;
And above the daisy tree
  Through the grasses,
High o'erhead the Bumble Bee
  Hums and passes.

Through that forest I can pass
Till, as in a looking-glass,
Humming fly and daisy tree
And my tiny self I see,
Painted very clear and neat
On the rain-pool at my feet.
Should a leaflet come to land
Drifting near to where I stand,
Straight I'll board that tiny boat
Round the rain-pool sea to float.

Little thoughtful creatures sit
On the grassy coasts of it;
Little things with lovely eyes
See me sailing with surprise.
Some are clad in armour green—
These have sure to battle been—
Some are pied with ev'ry hue,
Black and crimson, gold and blue;
Some have wings and swift are gone;—
But they all look kindly on.

When my eyes I once again
Open and see all things plain;
High bare walls, great bare floor;
Great big knobs on drawer and door;

Great big people perched on chairs,
Stitching tucks and mending tears,
Each a hill that I could climb,
And talking nonsense all the time—

O dear me,
That I could be
A sailor on the rain-pool sea,
A climber in the clover-tree,
And just come back, a sleepy head,
Late at night to go to bed.[81]

Add a whole concert of melodies, 'Unclassed', of which I have been giving samples, to those of a rank which I venture to treat as established. The result is to prove the title of British verse in the nineteenth century to a large space in the world's poetical literature. No Englishman would grudge Ireland her share also. Much of Irish minstrelsy naturally is devoted to national wrongs. There are the partisan songs of Lillibulero, the Boyne, and No Surrender, and anti-English street ballads, like The Croppy Boy, and The Shan Van Vocht:

O the French are in the bay,
They'll be here by break of day,
And the Orange will decay,
Says the Shan Van Vocht.

But not rarely the music does not allow itself to be drowned in the trumpet blasts:

She 's the most distressful country
That ever yet was seen;
They are hanging men and women
For wearing of the green!
O wearing of the green!
O wearing of the green!
My native land I cannot stand,
For wearing of the green!—

And—

Who fears to speak of 'Ninety-eight'?
Who blushes at the name?
When cowards mock the patriot's fate,
Who hangs his head for shame?
He's all a knave, or half a slave,
Who slights his country thus;
But a True man, like you, man,
Will fill your glass with us!

At least as often in the pauses of fire and ire is heard a note sometimes of pathos, as from

The bells of Shandon
That sound so grand on
The pleasant waters of the river Lee;

sometimes of gay casuistry by a lover arguing that

'Twould save us so much bother when we'd both be one another—
So listen now to reason, Molly Brierley.
O I'm not myself at all!

or a rapturous description of the Groves of Blarney, where

There 's statues gracing this noble place in—
All heathen gods and nymphs so fair;
Bold Neptune, Plutarch, and Nicodemus,
All standing naked in the open air![62]

It has been a melancholy duty, if inevitable, to pass in review work by a company of singers, when their turns arrive only after death. At least there is some satisfaction in the lapse of a sufficient interval to be entitled to conclude that some part of the total outlives a grave. Of writers who have departed in the few years of the present century no more can with right be stated than the effect their successive volumes produced as they appeared. All that Henley's and Lang's verse ever seemed

to require was the creation of a sufficient public educated to read between the lines. The publication of Lang's XXII Ballades in Blue China was, I remember, an event for academical circles. They are not forgotten now. Henley's poems had a similar success; and not a few of them also—for instance, England! My England! and Margaritæ Sorori—are remembered. Their defect was in inability to penetrate and hold average intelligences, as, in general, and for permanence of impression, poetry must. Yet Edwin Arnold—with The Light of Asia—and Lewis Morris—with Songs of Two Worlds and The Epic of Hades—if failure can be named in connexion with myriads of admirers—missed the more refined and select appreciation each coveted most. Gilbert won both classes with his Bab Ballads, and his evergreen dramas. Alas for the spark of genius in Davidson, with his Fleet Street Eclogues, and Ballads and Songs, which might have been fanned into a flame had it not been almost literally starved. As for Alfred Lyall, the splendid administrator, the sagacious counsellor, the eminent biographer, nothing might be thought to be wanting to his career but for a confession by himself. Read a piece which is inspired; and it seems to suggest an intellectual regret—'Too Late'—perhaps, for songs unsung—even deeper than at sequestration in the Far East for the best part of a lifetime from English society, air, ambitions, and cares:

> What far-reaching Nemesis stirred him
> From his home by the cool of the sea?
> When he left the fair country that reared him,
> When he left her, his mother, for thee,
> That restless, disconsolate worker
> Who strains now in vain at thy nets,
> O sombre and sultry Noverca!
> O Land of Regrets!

Has he learnt how thy honours are rated ?
Has he cast his accounts in thy school ?
With the sweets of authority sated,
Would he give up his throne to be cool ?
Doth he curse oriental romancing,
And wish he had toiled all his day,
At the Bar, or the Banks, or financing,
And got damned in a commonplace way ? [83]

But let me hasten to close the necrology of the 'Unclassed' —already overcrowded—with a name illustrious, as many in my survey, in another department of letters. George Meredith for the world at large, when it discovered him after two-thirds of an energetic career, as teacher and preacher, was a novelist, not understood, but prized. Before he died it had been barely aware that he wrote verse. It treated the little it read as an eccentric diversion of his leisure. Even now to most of his public it is a surprise that he has left behind him a collection of poems. Yet any student of his prose writings, though without knowledge of his biography, must feel he considered it his soul's vocation to be a poet's. He is not to be judged by pieces like that outburst, 'Jump to Glory, Jane!' They were accidents of sudden impulse. Really he is a poet-thinker of Nature, at once her student, priest, and prophet. He was ever watching lovingly her movements, and those of her wild children, with keener eyes even than those he bent on Man for the purposes of fiction. It might be the lark at dawn, beginning to round, and dropping

The silver chain of sound,
Of many links without a break,
In chirrup, whistle, slur and shake ; [84]

or, after sunset :

the curves of the white owl sweeping
Wavy in the dusk lit by one large star ; [85]

while

> Lone on the fir-branch, his rattle-note unvaried,
> Brooding o'er the gloom, spins the brown eve-jar.[86]

Woods he haunted, marking how

> A wind sways the pines,
> And below
> Not a breath of wild air ;[87]

awed, yet fascinated, by a sense, in deep night, of their wakefulness ; how

> Thousand eyeballs under hoods
> Have you by the hair.
> Enter these enchanted woods,
> You who dare ![88]

Continually was he appealing from sophisticated Humanity, which might be supposed to have been absorbing all his thought, to Earth, nourishing us in life, and caressing in death :

> green bounteous Earth !
> Bacchante Mother ! stern to those
> Who live not in thy heart of mirth ;
> Death, shall I shrink from loving thee ?
> Into the breast that gives the rose,
> Shall I with shuddering fall ?[89]

My purpose—perhaps not always fulfilled—has been to abstain from predictions of the title of certain from among the multitude of aspirants since Tennyson to count as classics in Anglo-Saxon poetry, and the final condemnation of the remainder as poetasters. Such dogmas are as futile as they are presumptuous. Posterity—not We, but Ours—will settle the point for themselves. But it is entirely lawful to consider rules for our own guidance as readers meanwhile. Form and melody are qualities of verse which it has become

possible to borrow as vehicles for mere counterfeits of poetic sensibility and insight. Tests by which such trappings may be distinguished from real flesh and blood, and soul, ought to be welcome. Two, I believe, few pretenders can pass successfully; and the application of the pair is not so difficult as might be supposed. The first is that the work itself be required to answer whether it have insisted on being written. This may appear to be an attempt to extort evidence of guilt by torture. It might be if verse resembled speech in other collocations. Really it is as hard to compel words to simulate inspiration as to have it. The second requisition should be simple enough, though, to judge by ordinary criticism, the impediments to compliance with it are enormous. For proof of poetical merit regard the highest and best in a writer's achievement. We advance not one step towards knowledge whether a man have poetry within him by dwelling on his failures, follies, or dullnesses. His average performance itself demonstrates little or nothing. Only the extreme reach of his thought, ideas, and fire tells us aught. Find verse to have produced on competent readers a feeling that thought and emotion have enforced ventilation of themselves in words; that they are resolved to breathe, to be sung; also, that, among any amount of inferior matter, there is an inspired particle;—and dare to deny that in the author there is the making of a poet!

[1] Ralegh, The Lie, st. 2. Works, Oxford, 1820. (Poems) vol. viii.

[2] Id., An Epitaph upon Sir Philip Sidney, st. 11. Ibid.

[3] Id., The Pilgrimage. Ibid.

[4] Wotton, To His Mistress, the Queen of Bohemia. Stanzas 1, 3, 4. Reliquiae Wottonianae, 1685.

[5] Nicholas Breton (A Sweet Lullabie), stanzas 2, 4, Arbor of Amorous Devices. Works, ed. A. B. Grosart, 1879.

[6] Bacon, The Bubble. Reliquiae Wottonianae.

[7] T. Dekker, H. Chettle, and W. Haughton, The Pleasant Comedy of Patient Grissil. Shakespeare Society, 1841.

[8] The Duchess of Malfy, Bosola's Song, Act iv, Sc. 2. Works of John Webster, ed. Alex. Dyce.

[9] Cupid and Death, Masque. Ode, 1653. James Shirley, Dramatic Works and Poems, ed. W. Gifford and A. Dyer.

[10] The Contention of Ajax and Ulysses. Dramatic Entertainment, Song. James Shirley, ibid.

[11] Alexander and Campaspe. John Lyly, Dramatic Works, ed. F. W. Fairholt.

[12] Rosalynde, Euphues Golden Legacie. Thomas Lodge.

[13] Disdain Returned, st. 1. The Poems of Thomas Carew, ed. Arthur Vincent. (The Muses' Library.)

[14] The Broken Heart. Song, Beyond the reach of Art. John Ford, Works, ed. W. Gifford and A. Dyer.

[15] Thomas Campion, st. 1. Fourth Book of Airs, 1617. Richard Alison, or Allison. An Howre's Recreation in Musike, 1606. (Anon., The Golden Treasury, F. T. Palgrave, No. 91.)

[16] (? Comedy by T. B.) st. 3, Anon.

[17] Sir William Davenant, Aubade.

[18] G. Wither, st. 5, Select Lyric Poems.

[19] An Excellent New Ballad—to the tune of 'I'll never love thee more!' by James Marquis of Montrose. Memoirs of Montrose, by Mark Napier.

[20] Syr Cauline, Ser. I, Book i, 4. Reliques of Ancient English Poetry, by Bishop (Thomas) Percy.

[21] The Ancient Ballad of Chevy Chase. Ibid., Ser. I, Book i, 1.

[22] William Drummond of Hawthornden. Song II. Poems. Ed. W. C. Ward. (The Muses' Library.)

[23] The Battle of Otterbourne (The Scottish Version), st. 19. Walter Scott's Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border.

[24] Sir Patrick Spens. Ibid.

[25] Willie's Drowned in Yarrow, stanzas 1, 2, 3, 8, 10, 11, pp. 25–7. Scottish Song, ed. Mary Carlyle Aitken.

[26] The Dowie Houms of Yarrow. Scott's Border Minstrelsy, stanzas 3–4.

[27] Fair Helen. Ibid., stanzas 6, 8, 10.

[28] Lady Anne, st. 8. Ibid.

[29] Earl Richard. Ibid.

[30] The Daemon Lover. Ibid.

[31] Jellon Grame. Ibid.

[32] Young Benjie. Ibid.

[33] The Cruel Sister (Binnorie, O Binnorie!). Ibid.

[34] The Queen's Marie. Scott's Border Minstrelsy, st. 18.

[35] Edward, Edward. 'A Scottish Ballad. From a MS. copy transmitted from Scotland.' Ser. I, Book i, 5, Percy's Reliques. (I have somewhat anglicized the spelling in Percy's copy.)

[36] Anon. Scottish Rivers, Sir Thomas Dick Lauder.

[37] The Twa Corbies. (Scott's Border Minstrelsy.) W. Motherwell's version, Minstrelsy, Ancient and Modern, varies.

[38] The Lochmaben Harper. (Scott's Border Minstrelsy.)

[39] Joseph Addison. (Johnson's Poets, vol. xxx.)

[40] Dr. Thomas Parnell, Song. (Johnson's Poets, vol. xxvii.)

[41] A Cradle Hymn, Dr. Isaac Watts. Moral Songs. (Johnson's Poets, vol. lvi, stanzas 1, 3, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 13.)

[42] Written at an Inn at Henley, st. 5. Shenstone, Levities (Johnson's Poets).

[43] The Vanity of Human Wishes.

[44] On the Death of Mr. Robert Levet, a Practiser in Physic, st. 2.

[45] Ambrose Philips—To Miss Charlotte Pulteney, in her Mother's Arms, May 1, 1724. (Johnson's Poets.)

[46] Sally in our Alley, stanzas 1 and 4. Henry Carey, Poems.

[47] Christopher Smart. A Song to David, st. 5. Works and Life, 1791.

[48] R. Browning. Parleyings with Certain People. (Christopher Smart), 3, vi.

[49] John Logan. Ode to the Cuckoo, stanzas 1, 6. Scottish Song, ed. Mary Carlyle Aitken.

[50] The Flowers of the Forest. Jane Elliot (Scott's Border Minstrelsy).

[51] Auld Robin Gray. Lady Anne Barnard (Lindsay), Lives of the Lindsays, vol. ii.

[52] Caller Herrin'. Lady Nairne. Poems, with Memoir, ed. Charles Rogers, 1869.

[53] The Land o' the Leal. Ibid.

[54] Canadian Boat Song (see letter from G. M. Fraser, Times Literary Supplement, Dec. 23, 1904, where it is mentioned that the song has been attributed variously to Professor Wilson, Lockhart, John Galt, and Lord Eglinton).

[55] On an Infant Dying as Soon as Born. Charles Lamb. Poet. Works. Bohn, 1841.

[56] Hester. Ibid.

[57] The Old Familiar Faces. Ibid.

[58] The Falling Leaf. The Poetical Works of James Montgomery.

[59] The Wife a-lost, stanzas 1, 2, 4. Poems of Rural Life—in the Dorset Dialect—by William Barnes. Second collection.

[60] A Dirge. Thomas Lovell Beddoes. Poetical Works. Ed. Edmund Gosse. 1890.

[61] Balder (Song sc. xxviii.), vol. ii. Poetical Works of Sydney Dobell.
[62] A Nuptial Eve (Keith of Ravelston). Ibid.
[63] Anna Letitia Aikin. Works. Ed. Lucy Aikin, 1825.
[64] Jesus, and A Long Railway Journey. Rev. Henry Stebbing, D.D. 1851.
[65] Fo'c's'le Yarns. Rev. Thomas Edward Brown.
[66] London Lyrics. Frederick Locker-Lampson.
[67] Echo, st. 1, Christina Rossetti. Goblin Market and Other Poems:
[68] Song. Ibid. [69] Up-hill. Ibid.
[70] Skipper Ireson's Ride. John Greenleaf Whittier, st. 8.
[71] To a Waterfowl, stanzas 1–6. William Cullen Bryant.
[72] Plaint. Ebenezer Elliott. More Verse and Prose by the Corn-law Rhymer.
[73] Lays of Ancient Rome (Battle of Lake Regillus). Thomas Babington Macaulay.
[74] Night and Death. Joseph Blanco White. Life, by himself.
[75] The Red Fisherman. William Mackworth Praed.
[76] A Song. Hartley Coleridge. Poems.
[77] Shadows. Poems. Richard Monckton-Milnes (Lord Houghton).
[78] Poems. Jean Ingelow.
[79] William Makepeace Thackeray. Poems.
[80] The Phrontisterion. Letters, &c. Very Rev. Henry Longueville Mansel, D.D.
[81] The Little Land. A Child's Garden of Verses. Robert Louis Stevenson.
[82] The Croppy Boy, The Shan Van Vocht. The Wearing of the Green. Anon. The Memory of the Dead. John Kells Ingram, D.D. The Bells of Shandon. Rev. Francis Mahony ('Father Prout'). I'm not Myself at all. Samuel Lover. The Groves of Blarney. R. A. Milliken. Irish Minstrelsy, H. Halliday Sparling. 1888.
[83] Verses Written in India. Sir Alfred Lyall. Kegan Paul, Trench, & Co., 1893.
[84] The Lark Ascending. George Meredith's Works. Memorial Edition. Constable & Co.
[85] Love in the Valley. Ibid. [86] Ibid.
[87] Dirge in Woods. Ibid.
[88] The Woods of Westermain. Ibid.
[89] Ode to the Spirit of Earth in Autumn. Ibid.

CONCLUSIONS?

FROM my first to my latest words on verse which is poetry, though, it may be, without a poet, I have had in my mind two questions. Consciously or unconsciously I have been asking myself: 'What, then, is Poetry?' and 'What makes a Poet?' I am unable to answer them yet to my own entire satisfaction.

I can enumerate the qualities which, single or several, never all together, unless perhaps in one superhuman case, I myself find in English verse. Fancy and Imagination, Form—or Style—, Stateliness, Passion, Charm, Mystery, Pathos, Atmosphere, and Spontaneity share among them whatever poetry is, in my judgement, entitled to be called great. Imagination and Fancy stand foremost; Imagination, conducting the processes of reconstructing, anticipating, prophesying; setting Fancy in motion; Fancy, whether independently, or, after Imagination has done its work, and sometimes before, seeing things under a changed aspect, the old as if they were new.

The absence of Form is more readily noted than its presence. When the distinguishing characteristic, as of Ben Jonson as poet, of Herrick, Waller, Suckling, and Lovelace, it is almost identical with Style. It implies Self-restraint, and Reserve. Frequently it has the happiness to be associated with too much of grandeur for it to be singled out as the writer's badge. Yet a poet may be illustrious without it; for Wordsworth is.

Stateliness and Passion, necessities sometimes, are often out of place. We want no finer example of the former than Paradise Lost, and no worse than Night Thoughts.

For Passion take Shelley, Swinburne. At their best they exemplify to perfection the self-abandonment, the ecstasy, which is the triumph of poetic art.

Charm in poetry every one feels, none can explain. It alters its hues to each reader's eyes. Analyse it, and the hand grasps air. It comes at nobody's beck and call; not even Milton's or Shelley's. Commonly, by no means always, it turns its back upon Wordsworth. It will not be parted from Herrick and Keats.

Mystery is a rare visitant, and welcome only when rare. It is among the distinctions of Christabel. It is the glory of Webster's weird execution-dirge; of Scottish 'Edward, Edward'; of Sydney Dobell's Keith of Ravelston. It is Edgar Allan Poe's prime engine, and his Evil Genius.

None can speak of Pathos as any longer shy and retiring. Of old it was little used. Not unknown among the Elizabethans, it was with them far from habitual. In later days it is its absence which would be remarkable. Both writer and critic are apt to find it a dangerous snare. They are liable to be bribed by it to accept their own heart-beats for music of the spheres. I hope I have already sufficiently warned my readers that they are free to discount my praises of verse whenever they themselves are inclined to shed a tear over it. In a poet to aim at pathos, scheme for it, is criminal. When it comes it should come as an incident, not as the motive, or calculated result. In great poetry, as Wordsworth's, it steals forth almost, as it were, against the poet's will.

I have left to the end a couple of qualities which are not so much separate properties of poetry as conditions or states of it. Each I regard as exceedingly precious. When we are not sure that we have learnt from a poem all which is to be learnt, that we have felt all which is to be felt,

when we suspect that it holds in reserve for us delightful possibilities, that it has entered into us, and that we are in spiritual unison with it—then and there I recognize Atmosphere. It is not a beginning or basis, but a result. When the feast is over a box of spikenard is broken ; and a fragrant vapour envelops all. Blake's verse floats in Atmosphere. So does Keats's Eve of St. Agnes. So Christabel. There is Atmosphere in Hogg's Kilmeny. I find none in Campbell, and little in Scott's own verse, though abundance in his Border Minstrelsy.

Akin to it, I suppose, though the state is as hard to describe as Atmosphere, is every supreme poet's and poem's strange power suddenly to open fresh sources in brain and heart. Forthwith issues a flood of feeling as magically sweet to reader as to writer. A mere versifier may go up and down, sinking wells everywhere. He tortures the depths of the soil. The entire region remains for him a desert, a Sahara. The poet comes with his willow bough ; and springs gush from the solid rock to meet the divining rod as it bends. It is a real gift, like the spell, the touch on human eyes, which used to reveal the coexistence with this earthy world of ours of actual Fairyland. I have named the condition for want of a better word, Spontaneity ; for its effects have no manifest cause. Really spontaneous generation is as unknown in poetry as in physics. Fancy sows the germs, and forgets where. They, when sprung-up, remember, and, after wandering away, return, as birds to their nesting-places. Nobody can tell the precise nature of the agent, whether it be a thing, or a power, a mode of action, an aspect of something else. It roams about the realm of poetry, lending itself out to this or that separate quality. Pomp at its touch becomes majesty. Charm rises everywhere, like

a floweret of the soil. Chimes from invisible belfries peal through the midnight air. The long dull story of poor Simon Lee is transfigured into an anthem of Humanity.

I have often thought what a surprise to the poet himself must be this investiture of the children of his brain with trailing clouds of glory, whence voyaging he knows not; the apparition among the creations for which his imagination had sorely laboured, of angelic beings as strange to him as the companion of the three Hebrews in the fiery furnace to the Chaldean King. Inspiration works no greater miracles than with its Spontaneity, and its Atmosphere.

Other qualities besides all those I have mentioned doubtless might be valuable in verse, if present. For example, there is Unselfconsciousness, a real virtue; only, I do not happen to have met with it in English poetry, outside Shakespeare's Plays. There is Surprise, which—not very rarely—does occur, as in the thrilling transition in Herrick's Daffodils from pity for the fleeting beauty of a flower to a call of universal mortality to prayer:

> Stay, stay
> Until the wasting day
> Has run
> But to the evensong;
> And having prayed together, we
> Will go with you along.

The properties I have been describing distinguish poems when composed. Before they came to their birth the poet must have undergone the influence of his period. Few besides Milton in his chief work, if he entirely, and Keats in all of his, have escaped a close relation to their age and its essential characteristics. The rule is for poetry to belong to its time. Its propensity is to express ideas, capable of true expression only in poetry, which have been

born of that time. The taste and fashion of the period may have changed and been forgotten. The spirit, if ever it were real and sincere, will, though tinged with the colours of its age, continue to live in literature. It may even burst anew into flame. If the period as a whole, or any distinct stratum in it, accepted as its voice a poet it had formed, he will remain a voice, though echoing from a wilderness. In any event he and the public which once listened to his music will have had to a large extent a community of soul.

Bacon has been argumentatively fabled to be the actual Shakespeare. The fancy would have been more plausible, if he had been described as a collaborator. Then there would be truth in it, but only a fraction of the truth. He must share the fellowship with Ralegh and Drake, Essex, the Cecils, the wits of the Mermaid, Sidney, Spenser, the buccaneer-mariners of Devon—with the entire awakened nation. All were together joint authors with Shakespeare of the Plays, and of many a famous poem for a half-century besides. Every author more or less, a poet most of all, represents his environings. The character of poetry always depends largely upon the personal element, on the natures of the readers, as well as on that of the poet. Warmed by the same sunshine, and buffeted by the same storms as they, he gives back to them their own in song. When we admire the antique without being able to give a reason for our admiration, it often is that insensibly we have lived back into another age by virtue of communion with one of its creatures and creators. The blood of a distant era is stirring in us.

It is not always direct sympathy with a period which sets natures poetically endowed singing to their generation. Sometimes it is an analogous emotion in a contrasted guise—a temper of revolt, the attraction of antipathy.

A minority has persuaded itself that the scene ought to be shifted. Herbert and Vaughan were inspired to protest against the manners of their time on behalf of Heaven. Later on, from the same disgust at the present, Cowley augured triumphs for science still unborn, but in the air. Samuel Butler mocked despotic Puritan Major-Generals. Dryden championed reaction, political and theological. Swift was jaundiced against a world as petty as Lilliput, and as coarse as Brobdingnag. Pope's spitfire, cynical indifferentism inspired itself with the social miasma it affected to loathe. Burns's Muse wavered between joy in Arcadian simplicity and an uneasy, a remorseful, rebelliousness against Kirk Sessions—perhaps, against family Saturday Nights themselves. Byron's defiance of his fellow men, Browning's disquisitions to society on the meaning it had forgotten of its own vagaries, and Tennyson's efforts to tempt it into becoming the ideal of its distorted, distracted self, are all alike steeped in the time's circumstances. Their public recognized itself—denounced, compassionated, moralized, etherealized—as their theme. Each popular singer in turn has believed himself a leader and a prophet. So he has been; but a leader, because most obediently representative of his followers, a prophet, because best translating the inclinations of his disciples by his own. Elizabethan grandeur and spaciousness reflect themselves in the giants of contemporary poetical literature. It is the same with the earthiness, the intellectual and spiritual poverty, of three-fourths of the eighteenth century. Every period craves to have itself poetically interpreted, though the lyre rasps and creaks. When it is without Jonsons and Herberts, and cannot commission enough Grays and Goldsmiths, it must perforce put up with Youngs and Akensides. In any case it longs to feel akin to the

minstrelsy. A poet bows to the same instinct. His song, whether in defiance, or response, was nursed in, and would return to, the hearts to which he sings.

Great poetry has characteristics, its very own. No less it indicates the special circumstances of its origin. The authors disguise themselves as little. Some verse exerts a distinctive power—amounting to compulsion—of referring itself back to the writer's personality. We cannot read Clough without curiosity as to the motive, the light which a piece throws upon the mental stage the poet had reached, the nearness to the goal. Evidently he wrote to tell himself. Here I am not alluding to such deliberate introspection. I am thinking of the sun-portraits inspiration takes; how it brings a whole being, with its respective tendencies and energies of all sorts, to mirror itself. Strongly marked and vigorous in the main features, usually with failings as self-evident, that being is bound to be. The Muse does not anoint her kings at random. In the elect we have a right to expect the sense of a natural title to the crowns placed on their heads. The assurance is superior to silence, to neglect. Though posterity may have forgotten, their royalty is indefeasible. The substance, material and spiritual, adopted by the poetic spark for its lodging, or home, ought to be self-sufficing. It should be able to entertain the guest, and survive with dignity its departure. Survey the dynasty of sovereign British poets to whom successive generations have paid homage. Beyond dispute nine-tenths will be admitted to have been not less remarkable as men than as poets: to remain remarkable when they have ceased to sing.

Genial Chaucer rises at my invocation, soldier, ambassador, and courtier, cheerfully careless of prelate's or friar's scowls. I see Spenser with the key to Fairyland, a states-

man also, almost single in appreciation of the national need to unearth and cut at the root of the Irish problem, though the ruthlessness of his policy for the purpose shocks and repels me. I see Shakespeare shrewd in affairs to a degree supposed to be incompatible with an angelic fancy. Milton stands forth, the unrivalled controversialist, when, for his period, aged; unsubdued by blindness and persecution. Dryden, though speaking very terrestrial thoughts, succeeds to the throne as by right divine. Pope, ever on the brink of the grave, with the vigour of immortal youth, and of insatiate rage against fate, drives his battle-car over ranks of venomous, prostrate poetasters. Cowper, combating the melancholy madness in his blood, is humorist, fighter, and seer, as well as martyr. Burns was a man, if with a full share of man's weaknesses; nobly planned by nature, lord of his company, whatever the company might be. Know Scott in his home, and you know Scott the poet; great in prosperity, greater in adversity. Wordsworth as poet had simply to translate into song his ideal of human duty. Coleridge, had he never written a line of verse, would have equally fascinated his Court. Byron, while making, alas! the music, had at all events the courage to face it. What a glorious instrument was Shelley, had his own generation but learnt how to play upon it! An apparent exception to the rule, Keats himself, we know now, was no mere dreamer; not at all of the kind to be snuffed out by a peevish reviewer, had physical vígour but matched imagination. And what, lastly, of the latest lords of Parnassus, Tennyson and Browning? Vast native intelligences, cast in different moulds, but equally from youth vowed to poetry—both given to labours enough to break a ploughman's back—pitted against one another by emulous partisans, yet never by a word accepting antagonism—

never, to all seeming or guessing, susceptible of a jealous suspicion!

Nature would have been cruel had she not equipped with manifold sturdiness those selected to hand the torch of inspiration from one generation to another. The poetic spirit is well advised in preferring to house in a big nature. The vocation of poet is among the most uncertain, the thorniest. With some verse, it is true, we find it difficult to associate the thought of toil. The writer might have

lisped in numbers, and the numbers came.

We do not know how Lamb's spirit, which loved to flow, like the Mole, underground, distilled his few and lovely strains. In general, however, the arduous character of the pursuit is indisputable. Never could fancy apparently have been more spontaneous than Goldsmith's; and he worked on a poem for years. The start for any writer may have been easy, a supply of imagination and fancy being presupposed. Very soon basking in the sun has to turn into delving and digging. The raw materials with which the poet deals, often are waiting in readiness for him; but he has to manufacture them. The thoughts and feelings he has to express are common to human nature; they are inarticulate until he has educated language, without external evidence of compulsion, to discover unknown capacities in itself for constituting it their voice. During the process, and as a condition of its success, all his energies are in a state of effervescence. Meanwhile, he has to look for the spirit to descend, and call a soul into being. For long probably there is no result. At length, not apparently out of the steam and bubbling, a shape becomes visible. A peculiarity of any poetry worthy of the name doubtless is that the work, as the

reader, perhaps as the worker, sees it, shall bear upon its face no evidence of the pains it has cost. Not the less is it the fruit of a protracted and vehement course of spiritual gymnastics; frequently of agony.

Courage, curiosity, patience, obstinacy, egotism, self-reliance, perhaps a spice too of self-conceit, all are wanted for the struggle against adversaries at home and abroad. The poet must have a will. He must insist on being blind and deaf to the claims of rival faculties; of his own, when inspiration is on him. They must even let themselves be harnessed to its chariot. Lack of doggedness in breaking-in counter intellectual and spiritual impulses, in obliging them to serve, has often smothered the poet under the philosopher or critic. A trial yet more afflicting is the duty of being master in his own house, to the self-torturing extent of setting bounds to the flights of his Queen—his Genius, his Inspiration itself; of imposing silence, of seating reason above ecstasy. All the time the world outside may act as though resentful of his mere existence. Having suffered his Muse, Medea-like, to toss him into the boiling cauldron, he issues forth, believing himself adorable. He sallies out in the cold, rain, storm, and darkness to woo the public with guitar and serenade, as if it were a loving mistress. He finds himself a butt for insolent ridicule, when, absorbed in his ideas, carried away by a prophetic rapture, he dances, like David, before the Ark. He must steel himself to bear persecution because he is honest, chill surprise when he is sublime, contempt when he announces to his age novelties which will be truisms for the next!

In the long and illustrious line scarcely a single member has not had to grope his way to renown through stifling fogs of prejudice. Nature seldom models any for poets without adding extreme sensitiveness to outside opinion.

They have to pretend not to care. Some stumble outright on the course. There have been

mighty Poets in their misery dead.

The immediate prizes at best are few, with hundreds to compete. Many are the early failures of ultimate winners. Almost more disheartening are the half-successes, like the fall of the fringe of a rain-cloud in a drought. Moore may have felt the ache when he found that his Melodies were not the forerunners of a great poem. Absolute triumphs themselves have their drawbacks in misapprehensions by popular enthusiasm of the real point and motive. Verily, as I take a bird's-eye view of the poetical hierarchy, with its perils and temptations, I am not surprised at the general coincidence of toughness, physical and mental, with inspiration in the few of its members who, in any age, stay out the race to the end.

A 'general', not universal, coincidence, I repeat—and the same qualification must be introduced whenever an attempt is made to imprison poetry and poets inside an absolute definition. I have tried the experiment with an enumeration of essential properties, as they might seem, belonging to whatever poetry is genuine. It has always failed, even down to the specification of metre itself as indispensable. None will deny that Ruskin constantly sings in prose, and De Quincey frequently. Shelley could be as musical in an essay as with his Skylark. I know of a sentence which is poetry in Hallam, an author as habitually unpicturesque as his own Wimpole Street. I have my doubts about a piece of Plantagenet portraiture in tough Bishop Stubbs. Though I cling to the belief that imagination and fancy are, one or both, necessary to true poetry, I should not care to dogmatize on it. Charm, I am

sure, ought to be ; and is not. With the splendour of the Ode on the Passions confronting me, I can lay down no law of an inevitable relationship of sentiment in great poetry to its period and country. While I am fully persuaded of the especial convenience of the union of moral and physical strength with the poetical temperament, I shrink from going further. Were I to pronounce the marriage indissoluble, I might expose myself to an immediate dilemma of having to choose between eating my words and the rejection of a masterpiece.

The utmost of certainty I possess is that, as I have many times intimated, the soul has moods, emotions, ideas, which, were there no such thing as poetry, would probably never have come into active, visible existence. As there is, they exist, and operate, yet, in default of poetry, would remain, for most of us, as if they were not. Poetry, whatever in its origin and essence it may be, proves its being by furnishing expression for them. For the purpose, it takes ordinary speech. Having by some strange, untraceable process of spiritual chemistry, which we call Inspiration, fused with it the mute spiritual germs, it introduces the amalgam into the common mind. Thereupon emotions, ideas, moods cease to be dumb ; and language swells into the diapason of an organ.

Without the poets innumerable phases of the soul, many of them among the highest, would never have come to life, completely, if at all. Eternal gratitude is their due, and, on the whole, is, I dare say, adequately rendered to the acknowledged princes of song. Candidates struggling upwards to the light receive hard measure. It appears to be considered that the ignominy of defeat in poetry ought to be proportionate to the possible, the rare, glory. Failures in prose are liable usually, as I know, to no more condign

penalty than neglect. Poets, unless they be crowned, are never safe from the pillory. They enter the lists at the peril of the doom threatened to law reformers in the old Greek State. In equity they well might plead that their critics ought equally to abide the risk. For myself I am fully conscious how fair the claim would be, and sincerely trust that I have behaved as if I were. Throughout I can assert that, in venturing to assume the critical character, I have had a constant sense of a cord round my own neck instead of the poet's. I have even felt a lively apprehension that the noose might be tightened by the thick fingers of some Georgian poet's ghost. For their own sakes, no less than for that of the public, members of the obnoxious profession, in which for my present purpose I have enrolled myself, are bound, I believe, to be always on the watch that they do not bar entrance within the temple of the Muses to angels unawares. Continually they should be reminding themselves that aspirants vainly seeking admittance in the despised guise of Minor Poets have been discovered ere this to be meditating poetry which is Great.

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With relation to the work in general of Lowell, Emerson, Poe, Longfellow, Bryant, and Whittier, I must ask pardon of our American kinsmen, with whom we share the heritage of verse, for having yielded to the temptation of numbering all writers of inspired English poetry as members of one brotherhood. To British readers I need make no excuse.

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BROWN, THOMAS EDWARD, Rev. (1830–1897).
BROWNE, WILLIAM (1591, or 1590–1643, or 1645 ?).
BROWNING, ELIZABETH BARRETT, Mrs. (1806–1861).
BROWNING, ROBERT (1812–1889).
BRYANT, WILLIAM CULLEN (1794–1878).
BUCHANAN, ROBERT (1841–1901).
BURNS, ROBERT (1759–1796).
BUTLER, SAMUEL (1612, or 1600–1680).
BYRON, GEORGE GORDON NOEL, Lord (1788–1824).

Calverley, Charles Stuart (1831–1884).
Campbell, Thomas (1777–1844).
Campion, Thomas (1567 ?–1619, or 1623).
Canning, George, Right Hon. (1770–1827).
Carew, Thomas (1595 ?, 1598 ?–1639 ?).
Carey, Henry (1696 ?–1743).
Chatterton, Thomas (1752–1770).
Chaucer, Geoffrey (1340 ?–1400).
Churchill, Charles, Rev. (1731–1764).
Clare, John (1793–1864).
Clough, Arthur Hugh (1819–1861).
Coleridge, Hartley (1796–1849).
Coleridge, Samuel Taylor (1772–1834).
Collins, William (1721–1759).
Cowley, Abraham (1618–1667).
Cowper, William (1731–1800).
Crabbe, George, Rev. (1754–1832).
Crashaw, Richard, Canon of Loretto (1613 ?–1649, or 1650).
Cunningham, Allan (1784–1842).

Davenant (or D'Avenant), William, Sir (1606–1668).
Davidson, John (1857–1909).
Dekker, Thomas (1570 ?–1641 ?).
Denham, John, Sir (1615–1668).
Dibdin, Charles (1745–1814).
Dobell, Sydney Thompson (1824–1874).
Dodgson, Charles Lutwidge, Rev. ('Lewis Carroll') (1832–1898).
Donne, John, Dr., Dean of St. Paul's (1573–1631).
Drummond, William, of Hawthornden (1585–1649).
Dryden, John (1631–1700).

Elliott, Ebenezer ('The Corn-Law Rhymer') (1781–1849).
Elliott, Jane (Jean) (1727–1805).
Emerson, Ralph Waldo (1803–1882).

FitzGerald, Edward (1809–1883).

Fletcher, John (1579–1625).
Ford, John (1586(baptized)–1639 ?).

Gay, John (1685–1732).
Gilbert, William Schwenck, Sir (1836–1912).
Goldsmith, Oliver (1728–1774).
Gray, Thomas (1716–1771).

Heber, Reginald, Bishop (1783–1826).
Hemans, Felicia Dorothea, Mrs. (1793–1835).
Henley, William Ernest (1849–1903).
Herbert, George, Rev. (1593–1633).
Herrick, Robert, Rev. (1591–1674).
Hogg, James (1770, or 1772–1835).
Hood, Thomas (1799, or 1798–1845).
Horne, Richard Henry (or Hengist) (1803–1884).
Hunt, James Henry Leigh (1784–1859).

Ingelow, Jean (1820–1897).
Ingram, John Kells, LL.D. (1823–1907).

Johnson, Samuel, LL.D. (1709–1784).
Jonson, Benjamin (1572, or 1573–1637).

Keats, John (1795–1821).
Keble, John, Rev. (1792–1866).
Kingsley, Charles, Rev. (1819–1875).

Lamb, Charles (1775–1834).
Landon, Letitia Elizabeth (Mrs. Maclean)—'L. E. L.' (1802–1838).
Landor, Walter Savage (1775–1864).
Lang, Andrew (1844–1912).
Locker-Lampson, Frederick (1821–1895).
Lodge, Thomas (1558 ?–1625).
Logan, John, Rev. (1748–1788).
Longfellow, Henry Wadsworth (1807–1882).

Lovelace, Richard, Colonel (1618–1658).
Lover, Samuel (1797–1868).
Lowell, James Russell (1819–1891).
Lyall, Alfred, Sir (1835–1911).
Lyly (Lilly, Lylie), John (1554 ?–1606).
Lytton, Edward George Earle Lytton-Bulwer (Lord Lytton) (1803–1873).
Lytton, Edward Robert Bulwer (Earl Lytton) (1831–1891).

Macaulay, Thomas Babington, Lord (1800–1859).
Mackay, Charles (1814–1889).
Mahony, Francis Sylvester ('Father Prout') (1804–1866).
Mansel, Henry Longueville, D.D., Dean (1820–1871).
Marvell, Andrew (1621–1678).
Massey, Gerald (1828–1907).
Meredith, George (1828–1909).
Mickle, William Julius (1735–1788).
Milliken, or Millikin, Richard Alfred (1767–1815).
Milman, Henry Hart, D.D., Dean of St. Paul's (1791–1868).
Milnes, Richard Monckton, Lord Houghton (1809–1885).
Milton, John (1608–1674).
Montgomery, James (1771–1854).
Montrose, James Graham, Marquis of (1612–1650).
Moore, Thomas (1779–1852).
Morris, Lewis, Sir (1833–1907).
Morris, William (1834–1896).
Moultrie, John, Rev. (1799–1874).

Newman, John Henry, D.D., Cardinal (1801–1890).
Norton, Caroline Elizabeth Sarah, Hon. (1808–1877).

Parnell, Thomas, D.D., Archdeacon (1679–1718).
Patmore, Coventry Kersey Dighton (1823–1896).
Percy, Thomas, Bishop (1729, or 1728–1811).
Philips, Ambrose (1671, or 1675 ?–1749).
Poe, Edgar Allan (1811–1849).
Pope, Alexander (1688–1744).

PRAED, WINTHROP MACKWORTH (1802–1839).
PRIOR, MATTHEW (1664–1721).
PROCTER, BRYAN WALLER ('BARRY CORNWALL') (1787–1874).

ROGERS, SAMUEL (1763–1855).
ROSSETTI, CHRISTINA GEORGINA (1830–1894).
ROSSETTI, DANTE GABRIEL (1828–1882).

SCOTT, WALTER, Sir (1771–1832).
SHAKESPEARE, WILLIAM (1564–1616).
SHELLEY, PERCY BYSSHE (1792–1822).
SHENSTONE, WILLIAM (1714–1763).
SHIRLEY, JAMES (1596–1666).
SIDNEY, PHILIP, Sir (1554–1586).
SMART, CHRISTOPHER (1722–1771).
SMITH, ALEXANDER (1830–1867).
SMITH, HORATIO (HORACE) (1779–1849).
SMITH, JAMES (1775–1839).
SOUTHEY, ROBERT, D.C.L. (1774–1843).
SPENSER, EDMUND (1552, or 1551–1599).
STEBBING, HENRY, Rev., D.D. (1799–1883).
STEVENSON, ROBERT LOUIS (1850–1894).
SUCKLING, JOHN, Sir (1609–1642).
SWIFT, JONATHAN, Dean of St. Patrick's (1667–1745).
SWINBURNE, ALGERNON CHARLES (1837–1909).

TALFOURD, THOMAS NOON, Sir (1795–1854).
TENNYSON, ALFRED, Lord (1809–1892).
TENNYSON, FREDERICK (1807–1898).
THACKERAY, WILLIAM MAKEPEACE (1811–1863).
THOMSON, JAMES (1700–1748).
TRENCH, RICHARD CHENEVIX, D.D., Archbishop (1807–1886).
TURNER, CHARLES TENNYSON (1808–1879).

VAUGHAN, HENRY (1622–1695).
VERE, AUBREY DE, Sir (1788–1846).
VERE, AUBREY THOMAS DE (1814–1902).

WALLER, EDMUND (1606–1687).
WARTON, THOMAS (1728–1790).
WATTS, ALARIC ALEXANDER (1797–1864).
WATTS, ISAAC, D.D. (1674–1748).
WEBSTER, JOHN (1580 ?–1625 ?).
WELLS, CHARLES JEREMIAH (1799 ?–1879).
WHITE, HENRY KIRKE (1785–1806).
WHITE, JOSEPH BLANCO (1775–1841).
WILSON, JOHN, Professor ('CHRISTOPHER NORTH') (1785–1854).
WITHER (or WITHERS), GEORGE (1588–1667).
WOLFE, CHARLES, Rev. (1791–1823).
WORDSWORTH, WILLIAM (1770–1850).
WORSLEY, PHILIP STANHOPE (1835–1866).
WOTTON, HENRY, Sir (1568–1639).

YOUNG, EDWARD, Rev., D.C.L. (1683, or 1681–1765).

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